PRACTICAL PIETY;

OR,

THE INFLUENCE

OF THE

RELIGION OF THE HEART

ON

THE CONDUCT OF THE LIFE.

BY HANNAH MORE.

The fear of God begins with the Heart, and purifies and rectifies it: and from the Heart, thus rectified, grows a conformity in the Life, the Words, and the Actions. *Sir Matthew Hale's Contemplations.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY MUNROE AND FRANCIS, SHAKSPEARE BOOKSTORE, NO. 4, CORNHILL.

1811.

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OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAP. XII.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

In this age of general inquiry, every kind of ignorance is esteemed dishonourable. In almost every sort of knowledge there is a competition for superiority. Intellectual attainments are never to be undervalued. Learning is the best human thing. All knowledge is excellent as far as it goes, and as long as it lasts. But how short is the period before "tongues shall cease, and knowledge shall vanish away!"

Shall we then esteem it dishonourable to be ignorant in any thing which relates to life and literature, to taste and science, and not feel ashamed to live in ignorance of our own hearts?

To have a flourishing estate and a mind in disorder; to keep exact accounts with a Stew-

ard and no reckoning with our Maker; to have an accurate knowledge of loss or gain in our business, and to remain utterly ignorant whether our spiritual concerns are improving or declining; to be cautious in ascertaining at the end of every year how much we have increased or diminished our fortune, and to be careless whether we have incurred profit or loss in faith and holiness, is a wretched miscalculation of the comparative value of things. To bestow our attention on objects in an inverse proportion to their importance, is surely no proof that our learning has improved our judgment.

That deep thinker and acute reasoner, Dr. Barrow, has remarked that "it is a peculiar excellency of human nature, and which distinguishes man from the inferior creatures more than bare reason itself, that he can reflect upon all that is done within him, can discern the tendencies of his soul, and is acquainted with his own purposes."

This distinguishing faculty of self-inspection would not have been conferred on man, if it had not been intended that it should be in habitual operation. It is surely, as we before observed, as much a common law of prudence, to look well to our spiritual as to our worldly possessions. We have appetites to control,

imaginations to restrain, tempers to regulate, passions to subdue, and how can this internal work be effected, how can our thoughts be kept within due bounds, how can a proper bias be given to the affections, how can "the little state of man" be preserved from continual insurrection, how can this restraining power be maintained, if this capacity of discerning, if this faculty of inspecting be not kept in regular exercise? Without constant discipline, imagination will become an outlaw, conscience an attainted rebel.

This inward eye, this power of introversion, is given us for a continual watch upon the soul. On an unremitted vigilance over its interior motions, those fruitful seeds of action, those prolific principles of vice and virtue, will depend both the formation and the growth of our moral and religious character. A superficial glance is not enough for a thing so deep, an unsteady view will not suffice for a thing so wavering, nor a casual look for a thing so deceitful as the human heart. A partial inspection on any one side, will not be enough for an object which must be observed under a variety of aspects, because it is always shifting its position, always changing its appearances.

We should examine not only our conduct but our opinions; not only our faults but our

prejudices, not only our propensities but our judgments. Our actions themselves will be obvious enough; it is our intentions which require the scrutiny. These we should follow up to their remotest springs, scrutinize to their deepest recesses, trace through their most perplexing windings. And lest we should, in our pursuit, wander in uncertainty and blindness, let us make use of that guiding clue which the Almighty has furnished by his word, and by his spirit, for conducting us through the intricacies of this labyrinth. "What I know not teach Thou me," should be our constant petition in all our researches.

Did we turn our thoughts inward, it would abate much of the self-complacency with which we swallow the flattery of others. Flattery hurts not him who flatters not himself. If we examined our motives keenly, we should frequently blush at the praises our actions receive. Let us then conscientiously enquire not only what we do, but whence and why we do it, from what motive and to what end.

Self-inspection is the only means to preserve us from self-conceit. We could not surely so very extravagantly value a being whom we ourselves should not only see, but feel to be so full of faults. Self-acquaintance will give us a far more deep and intimate knowledge of our

own errors than we can possibly have, with all the inquisitiveness of an idle curiosity, of the errors of others. We are eager enough to blame them without knowing their motives. We are no less eager to vindicate ourselves, though we cannot be entirely ignorant of our own. Thus two virtues will be acquired by the same act, humility, and candor; an impartial review of our own infirmities, being the likeliest way to make us tender and compassionate to those of others.

Nor shall we be liable so to over-rate our own judgment when we perceive that it often forms such false estimates, is so captivated with trifles, so elated with petty successes, so dejected with little disappointments. When we hear others commend our charity which we know is so cold; when others extol our piety which we feel to be so dead; when they applaud the energies of our faith, which we must know to be so faint and feeble; we cannot possibly be so intoxicated with the applauses which never would have been given had the applauder known us as we know, or ought to know ourselves. If we contradict him, it may be only to draw on ourselves the imputation of a fresh virtue, humility, which perhaps we as little deserve to have ascribed to us as that which we have been renouncing.

If we kept a sharp look out, we should not be proud of praises which cannot apply to us, but should rather grieve at the involuntary fraud of imposing on others, by tacitly accepting a character to which we have so little real pretension. To be delighted at finding that people think so much better of us than we are conscious of deserving, is in effect to rejoice in the success of our own deceit.

We shall also become more patient, more forbearing and forgiving, shall better endure the harsh judgment of others respecting us, when we perceive that their opinion of us nearly coincides with our own real though unacknowledged sentiments. There is much less injury incurred by others thinking too ill of us, than in our thinking too well of ourselves.

It is evident then, that to live at random, is not the life of a rational, much less of an immortal, least of all of an accountable being. To pray occasionally, without a deliberate course of prayer; to be generous without proportioning our means to our expenditure; to be liberal without a plan, and charitable without a principle; to let the mind float on the current of public opinion, lie at the mercy of events for the probable occurrence of which we have made no provision; to be every hour

liable to death without any habitual preparation for it ; to carry within us a principle which we believe will exist through all the countless ages of eternity, and yet to make little enquiry whether that eternity is likely to be happy or miserable—all this is an inconsiderateness which, if adopted in the ordinary concerns of life, would bid fair to ruin a man's reputation for common sense ; yet of this infatuation he who lives without self-examination is absolutely guilty.

Nothing more plainly shews us what weak vascillating creatures we are, than the difficulty we find in fixing ourselves down to the very self-scrutiny we had deliberately resolved on. Like the worthless Roman Emperor we retire to our closet under the appearance of serious occupation, but might now and then be surprised, if not in catching flies, yet in pursuits nearly as contemptible. Some trifle which we should be ashamed to dwell upon at any time, intrudes itself on the moments dedicated to serious thought ; recollection is interrupted ; the whole chain of reflection broken, so that the scattered links cannot again be united. And so inconsistent are we that we are sometimes not sorry to have a plausible pretence for interrupting the very employment in which we had just before made it a duty to engage. For

want of this home acquaintance, we remain in utter ignorance of our inability to meet even the ordinary trials of life with cheerfulness; indeed by this neglect we confirm that inability. Nursed in the lap of luxury, we have an indefinite notion that we have but a loose hold on the things of this world, and of the world itself. —But let some accident take away, not the world, but some trifle on which we thought we set no value while we possessed it, and we find to our astonishment that we hold, not the world only, but even this trivial possession with a pretty tight grasp. Such detections of our self-ignorance, if they do not serve to wean, ought at least to humble us.

There is a spurious sort of self-examination which does not serve to enlighten but to blind. A person who has left off some notorious vice, who has softened some shades of a glaring sin, or substituted some outward forms in the place of open irreligion, looks on his change of character with pleasure. He compares himself with what he was, and views the alteration with self-complacency. He deceives himself by taking his standard from his former conduct, or from the character of still worse men, instead of taking it from the unerring rule of scripture. He looks rather at the discredit than the sinfulness of his former life, and being more ashamed of what is disreputable than

grieved at what is vicious, he is, in this state of shallow reformation, more in danger in proportion as he is more in credit. He is not aware that it is not having a fault or two less that will carry him to heaven, while his heart is still glued to the world and estranged from God.

If we ever look into our hearts at all, we are naturally most inclined to it when we think we have been acting right. Here inspection gratifies self-love. We have no great difficulty in directing our attention to an object when that object presents us with pleasing images. But it is a painful effort to compel the mind to turn in on itself, when the view only presents subjects for regret and remorse. This painful duty however must be performed, and will be more salutary in proportion as it is less pleasant.—Let us establish it into a habit to ruminate on our faults. With the recollection of our virtues we need not feed our vanity. They will, if that vanity does not obliterate them, be recorded elsewhere.

We are also most disposed to look at those parts of our character which will best bear it, and which consequently least need it: at those parts which afford most self-gratulation. If a covetous man, for instance, examines himself, instead of turning his attention to the peccant part, he applies the probe where he

knows it will not go very deep; he turns from his avarice to that sobriety of which his very avarice is perhaps the source. Another, who is the slave of passion, fondly rests upon some act of generosity, which he considers as a fair commutation for some favourite vice, that would cost him more to renounce than he is willing to part with. We are all too much disposed to dwell on that smiling side of the prospect which pleases and deceives us, and to shut our eyes upon that part which we do not chuse to see, because we are resolved not to quit. Self-love always holds a screen between the superficial self-examiner and his faults. The nominal Christian wraps himself up in forms which he makes himself believe are religion. He exults in what he does, overlooks what he ought to do, nor ever suspects that what is done at all can be done amiss.

As we are so indolent that we seldom examine a truth on more than one side, so we generally take care that it shall be that side which shall confirm some old prejudices. While we will not take pains to correct those prejudices and to rectify our judgment, lest it should oblige us to discard a favourite opinion, we are yet as eager to judge, and as forward to decide, as if we were fully possessed of the grounds on which a sound judgment may be made, and a just decision formed.

We should watch ourselves whether we observe a simple rule of truth and justice, as well in our conversation, as in our ordinary transactions; whether we are exact in our measures of commendation and censure; whether we do not bestow extravagant praise where simple approbation alone is due; whether we do not with-hold commendation, where, if given, it would support modesty and encourage merit; whether what deserves only a slight censure as imprudent, we do not reprobate as immoral; whether we do not sometimes affect to over-rate ordinary merit, in the hope of securing to ourselves the reputation of candour, that we may on other occasions, with less suspicion, depreciate established excellence. We extol the first because we fancy that it can come into no competition with us, and we derogate from the last because it obviously eclipses us.

Let us ask ourselves if we are conscientiously upright in our estimation of benefits; whether when we have a favour to ask we do not depreciate its value, when we have one to grant we do not aggravate it.

It is only by scrutinizing the heart that we can know it. It is only by knowing the heart that we can reform the life. Any careless observer indeed, when his watch goes wrong,

may see that it does so by casting an eye on the dial plate; but it is only the artist who takes it to pieces and examines every spring and every wheel separately, and who, by ascertaining the precise causes of the irregularity, can set the machine right, and restore the obstructed movements.

The illusions of intellectual vision would be materially corrected, by a close habit of cultivating an acquaintance with our hearts. We fill much too large a space in our own imaginations; we fancy we take up more room in the world than Providence assigns to an individual who has to divide his allotment with so many millions, who are all of equal importance in their own eyes; and who, like us, are elbowing others to make room for themselves. Just as in the natural world, where every particle of matter would stretch itself, and move out of its place, if it were not kept in order by surrounding particles; the pressure of other parts reduces this to remain in a confinement from which it would escape, if it were not thus pressed and acted upon on all sides. The conscientious practice we have been recommending, would greatly assist in reducing us to our proper dimensions, and in limiting us to our proper place. We should be astonished if we could see our real diminutiveness, and the

speck we actually occupy. When shall we learn from our own feelings of how much consequence every man is to himself?

Nor must the examination be occasional, but regular. Let us not run into long arrears, but settle our accounts frequently. Little articles will run up to a large amount, if they are not cleared off. Even our *innocent* days, as we may chuse to call them, will not have passed without furnishing their contingent. Our deadness in devotion—our eagerness for human applause—our care to conceal our faults rather than to correct them—our negligent performance of some relative duty—our imprudence in conversation, especially at table—our inconsideration—our driving to the very edge of permitted indulgences—let us keep these—let us keep all our numerous items in small sums. Let us examine them while the particulars are fresh in our memory, otherwise, however we may flatter ourselves that lesser evils will be swallowed up by the greater, we may find when we come to settle the grand account, that they will not be the less remembered for not having been recorded.

And let it be one subject of our frequent inquiry, whether since we last scrutinized our hearts, our secular affairs, or our eternal concerns have had the predominance there.

We do not mean which of them has occupied most of our time, the larger portion of which must, necessarily, to the generality, be absorbed in the cares of the present life; but on which our affections have been most bent; and especially how we have conducted ourselves when there has arisen a competition between the interests of both.

That general burst of sins which so frequently rushes in on the consciences of the dying, would be much moderated by previous habitual self-examination. It will not do to repent in the lump. The sorrow must be as circumstantial as the sin. Indefinite repentance is no repentance. And it is one grand use of self-enquiry, to remind us that all unforsaken sins are unrepented sins.

To a Christian there is this substantial comfort attending a minute self-inspection, that when he finds fewer sins to be noted, and more victories over temptation obtained, he has a solid evidence of his advancement, which well repays his trouble.

The faithful searcher into his own heart, that "chamber of Imagery," feels himself in the situation of the Prophet*, who being conducted in vision from one idol to another, the spirit at sight of each, repeatedly exclaims,

* Ezekiel.

"here is another abomination!" The prophet being commanded to dig deeper, the further he penetrated the more evils he found, while the spirit continued to cry out, "I will shew thee yet more abominations."

Self-examination by detecting self-love, self-denial by weakening its power, self-government by reducing its despotism, turns the temper of the soul from its natural bias, controls the disorderly appetite, and, under the influence of divine grace, in a good measure restores to the man that dominion over himself, which God at first gave him over the inferior creatures. Desires, passions, and appetites are brought to move somewhat more in their appointed order, subjects not tyrants. What the Stoics vainly pretended to, Christianity effects. It restores man to a dominion over his own will, and in a good measure enthrones him in that empire which he had forfeited by sin.

He now begins to survey his interior, the awful world within; not indeed with self-complacency, but with the control of a Sovereign, he still finds too much rebellion to indulge security, he therefore continues his inspection with vigilance, but without perturbation. He continues to experience a remainder of insubordination and disorder, but this rather solicits to a stricter government than drives him to relax his discipline.

This self-inspection somewhat resembles the correction of a literary performance. After many and careful revisals, though some grosser faults may be done away; though the errors are neither quite so numerous, nor so glaring as at first, yet the critic perpetually perceives faults which he had not perceived before; negligences appear which he had overlooked, and even defects start up which had passed on him for beauties. He finds much to amend, and even to expunge, in what he had before admired. When by rigorous castigation the most acknowledged faults are corrected, his critical acumen, improved by exercise, and a more habitual acquaintance with his subject, still detects and will for ever detect, new imperfections. But he neither throws aside his work, nor remits his criticism, which if it do not make the work perfect, will at least make the author humble. Conscious that if it is not quite so bad as it was, it is still at an immeasurable distance from the required excellence.

Is it not astonishing that we should go on repeating periodically, "Try me, O God," while we are yet neglecting to try ourselves? Is there not something more like defiance than devotion to invite the inspection of Omniscience to that heart which we ourselves neg-

lect to inspect? How can a Chrtstian solemnly cry out to the Almighty, "seek the ground of my heart, prove me and examine my thoughts, and see if there be any ways of wickedness in me," while he himself neglects to "examine his heart," is afraid of "proving his thoughts," and dreads to enquire if there "be any way of wickedness" in himself, knowing that the inquiry ought to lead to the expulsion.

In our self-inquisition let us fortify our virtue by a rigorous exactness in calling things by their proper names. Self-love is particularly ingenious in inventing disguises of this kind. Let us lay them open, strip them bare, face them, and give them as little quarter as if they were the faults of another. Let us not call wounded pride delicacy. Self-love is made up of soft and sickly sensibilities. Not that sensibility which melts at the sorrows of others, but that which cannot endure the least suffering itself. It is alive in every pore where self is concerned. A touch is a wound. It is careless in inflicting pain, but exquisitely awake in feeling it. It defends itself before it is attacked, revenges affronts before they are offered, and resents as an insult the very suspicion of an imperfection.

In order then to unmask our hearts, let us not be contented to examine our vices, let us examine our virtues also, "those smaller faults." Let us scrutinize to the bottom those qualities and actions which have more particularly obtained public estimation. Let us enquire if they were genuine in the principle, simple in the intention, honest in the prosecution. Let us ask ourselves if in some admired instances our generosity had no tincture of vanity, our charity no taint of ostentation? Whether, when we did such a right action which brought us credit, we should have persisted in doing it, had we foreseen that it would incur censure? Do we never deceive ourselves by mistaking a constitutional indifference of temper for Christian moderation? Do we never construe our love of ease into deadness of the world? Our animal activity into Christian zeal? Do we never mistake our obstinacy for firmness, our pride for fortitude, our selfishness for feeling, our love of controversy for the love of God, our indolence of temper for superiority to human applause? When we have stripped our good qualities bare; when we have made all due deductions for natural temper, easiness of disposition, self-interest, desire of admiration, of every extrinsic appendage, every illegitimate motive, let us fairly

cast up the account, and we shall be mortified to see how little there will remain. Pride may impose itself upon us even in the shape of repentance. The humble Christian is grieved at his faults, the proud man is angry at them. He is indignant when he discovers he has done wrong, not so much because his sin offends God, as because it has let him see that he is not quite so good as he had tried to make himself believe.

It is more necessary to excite us to the humbling of our pride than to the performance of certain good actions; the former is more difficult as it is less pleasant. That very pride will of itself stimulate to the performance of many things that are laudable. These performances will reproduce pride as they were produced by it; whereas humility has no outward stimulus. Divine grace alone produces it. It is so far from being actuated by the love of fame, that it is not humility, till it has laid the desire of fame in the dust.

If an actual virtue consists, as we have frequently had occasion to observe, in the dominion over the contrary vice, humility is the conquest over pride, charity over selfishness, not only a victory over the natural temper, but a substitution of the opposite quality. This proves that all virtue is founded in self-

denial, self-denial in self-knowledge, and self-knowledge in self-examination. Pride so insinuates itself in all we do, and say, and think, that our apparent humility has not seldom its origin in pride. That very impatience which we feel at the perception of our faults is produced by the astonishment at finding that we are not perfect. This sense of our sins should make us humble but not desperate. It should teach us to distrust every thing in ourselves, and to hope for every thing from God. The more we lay open the wounds which sin has made, the more earnestly shall we seek the remedy which Christianity has provided.

But instead of seeking for self-knowledge, we are glancing about us for grounds of self-exaltation. We almost resemble the Pharisee who with so much self-complacency delivered in the catalogue of his own virtues and other men's sins, and, like the Tartars, who think they possess the qualities of those they murder, fancied that the sins of which he accused the Publican would swell the amount of his own good deeds. Like him we take a few items from memory, and a few more from imagination. Instead of pulling down the edifice which pride has raised, we are looking round on our good works for buttresses to prop it up. We excuse ourselves from the imputation

of many faults by alleging that they are common, and by no means peculiar to ourselves. This is one of the weakest of our deceits. Faults are not less personally our's because others commit them. There is divisibility in sin as well as in matter. Is it any diminution of our error that others are guilty of the same?

Self-love being a very industrious principle has generally two concerns in hand at the same time. It is as busy in concealing our own defects as in detecting those of others, especially those of the wise and good. We might indeed direct its activity in the latter instance to our own advantage, for if the faults of good men are injurious to themselves, they might be rendered profitable to us, if we were careful to convert them to their true use. But instead of turning them into a means of promoting our own watchfulness, we employ them mischievously in two ways. We lessen our respect for pious characters when we see the infirmities which are blended with their fine qualities, and we turn their failings into a justification of our own, which are not like theirs overshadowed with virtues. To admire the excellences of others without imitating them is fruitless admiration, to condemn their errors without avoiding them is unprofitable censoriousness.

When we are compelled by our conscience, to acknowledge and regret any fault we have recently committed, this fault so presses upon our recollection, that we seem to forget that we have any other. This single error fills our mind, and we look at it as through a telescope, which, while it shews an object, confines the sight to that one object exclusively. Others indeed are more effectually shut out, than if we were not examining this. Thus while the object in question is magnified, the others are as if they did not exist.

It seems to be established into a kind of system not to profit by any thing without us, and not to cultivate an acquaintance with any thing within us. Though we are perpetually remarking on the defects of others, yet when does the remark lead us to study and to root out the same defects in our own hearts? We are almost every day hearing of the death of others, but does it induce us to reflect on death as a thing in which we have an individual concern? We consider the death of a friend as a loss, but seldom apply it as a warning. The death of others we lament, the faults of others we censure, but how seldom do we make use of the one for our own amend-

ment, or of the other for our own preparation* ?

It is the fashion of the times to try experiments in the Arts, in Agriculture, in Philosophy. In every science the diligent professor is always afraid there may be some secret which he has not yet attained, some occult principle which would reward the labour of discovery, something even which the assiduous and intelligent have actually found out, but which has hitherto eluded *his* pursuit. And shall the Christian stop short in his scrutiny, shall he not examine and enquire till he lays hold on the very heart and core of religion ?

Why should experimental philosophy be the prevailing study, and experimental religion be branded as the badge of enthusiasm, the cant of a hollow profession ? Shall we never labour to establish the distinction between appearance and reality, between studying religion critically and embracing it practically ? between having our conduct creditable and our heart sanctified ? Shall we not aspire to do the best things from the highest motives, and elevate our aims with our attainments ? Why should we remain in the Vestibule when

* For this hint, and a few others on the same subject, the Author is indebted to that excellent Christian Moralist, M. Nicole.

the Sanctuary is open? Why should we be contented to dwell in the outer courts when we are invited to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus?

Natural reason is not likely to furnish arguments sufficiently cogent, nor motives sufficiently powerful, to drive us to a close self-inspection. Our corruptions foster this ignorance. To this they owe their undisputed possession of our hearts. No principle short of Christianity is strong enough to impel us to a study so disagreeable as that of our faults. Of Christianity, humility is the prime grace, and this grace can never take root and flourish in a heart that lives in ignorance of itself. If we do not know the greatness and extent of our sins, if we do not know the imperfection of our virtues, the fallibility of our best resolutions, the infirmity of our purest purposes, we cannot be humble; if we are not humble, we cannot be Christians.

But it may be asked, is there to be no end to this vigilance? Is there no assigned period when this self-denial may become unnecessary? No given point when we may be emancipated from this vexatious self-inspection? Is the matured Christian to be a slave to the same drudgery as the novice? The true an-

swer is—we may cease to watch, when our spiritual enemy ceases to assail. We may be off our guard when there is no longer any temptation without. We may cease our self-denial when there is no more corruption within. We may give the reins to our imagination when we are sure its tendencies will be towards heaven. We may dismiss repentance when sin is abolished. We may indulge selfishness when we can do it without danger to our souls. We may neglect prayer when we no longer need the favour of God. We may cease to praise him when he ceases to be gracious to us.—To discontinue our vigilance at any period short of this will be to defeat all the virtues we have practised on earth, to put to hazard all our hopes of happiness in heaven.

CHAP. XIII.

SELF-LOVE.

"THE idol Self," says an excellent old divine*, "has made more desolation among men than ever was made in those places where idols were served by human sacrifices. It has preyed more fiercely on human lives, than Moloch or the Minotaur."

To worship images is a more obvious, but it is scarcely a more degrading idolatry, than to set up self in opposition to God. To devote ourselves to this service is as perfect slavery as the service of God is perfect freedom. If we cannot imitate the sacrifice of Christ in his death, we are called upon to imitate the sacrifice of himself in his will. Even the Son of God declared, "I came not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." This was his grand lesson, this was his distinguishing character.

* Howe.

Self-will is the ever flowing fountain of all the evil tempers which deform our hearts, of all the boiling passions which inflame and disorder society ; the root of bitterness on which all its corrupt fruits grow. We set up our own understanding against the wisdom of God, and our own passions against the will of God. If we could ascertain the precise period when sensuality ceased to govern in the animal part of our nature, and pride in the intellectual, that period would form the most memorable æra of the Christian life ; from that moment he begins a new date of liberty and happiness ; from that stage he sets out on a new career of peace, liberty, and virtue.

Self-love is a Proteus of all shapes, shades, and complexions. It has the power of dilatation and contraction as best serves the occasion. There is no crevice so small through which its subtle essence cannot force its way, no space so ample that it cannot stretch itself to fill.—It is of all degrees of refinement ; so coarse and hungry as to gorge itself with the grossest adulation, so fastidious as to require a homage as refined as itself ; so artful as to elude the detection of ordinary observers, so specious as to escape the observation of the very heart in which it reigns paramount : yet, though so extravagant in its appetites, it can adopt a mode-

ration which imposes, a delicacy which veils its deformity, an artificial character which keeps its real one out of sight.

We are apt to speak of self-love as if it were only a symptom, whereas it is the distemper itself; a malignant distemper which has possession of the moral constitution, of which malady every part of the system participates. In direct opposition to the effect produced by the touch of the fabled king, which converted the basest materials into gold, this corrupting principle pollutes, by coming in contact with it, whatever is in itself great and noble.

Self-love is the centre of the unrenewed heart. This stirring principle, as has been observed, serves indeed

the virtuous mind to wake;

but it disturbs it from its slumber to ends and purposes directly opposite to those assigned to it by our incomparable bard*. Self-love is by no means "the small pebble which stirs the peaceful lake." It is rather the pent-up wind within, which causes the earthquake; it is the tempest which agitates the sleeping ocean. Had the image been as just as its cloathing is beautiful; or rather had Mr. Pope been as sound a theologian as he was an exquisite

* Essay on Man, l. 362.

poet, the allusion in his hands might have conveyed a sounder meaning without losing a particle of its elegance. This might have been effected by only substituting the effect for the cause ; that is, by making benevolence the principle instead of the consequence, and by discarding self-love from its central situation in the construction of the metaphor.

But by arraying a beggarly idea in princely robes, he knew that his own splendid powers could at any time transform meanness into majesty, and deformity into beauty.

After all however, *le vrai est le seul beau.* Had he not blindly adopted the misleading system of the noble sceptic, " His guide, philosopher and friend," he might have transferred the shining attributes of the base-born thing which he has dressed out with so many graces to the legitimate claimant, Benevolence ; of which self-love is so far from being, as he represents, the moving spring, that they are both working in a course of incessant counteraction, the spirit striving against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit.

To Christian benevolence all the happy effects attributed to self-love might have been fairly traced. It was only to dislodge the idol and make the love of God the centre, and the

poet's delightful numbers might have conveyed truths worthy of so perfect a vehicle. "This centre moved," does indeed extend its pervading influence in the very manner ascribed to the opposite principle; does indeed spread from its throne in the individual breast, to all those successive circles, "wide and more wide" of which the poet makes self-love the first mover.*

The Apostle James appears to have been of a different opinion from the Ethic bard; he speaks as if he suspected that the pebble stirred the lake a little too roughly. He traces this mischievous principle from its birth to the largest extent of its malign influence.—The question, "whence come wars and fightings among you?" he answers by another question—"come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

* Self-love thus push'd to social, to divine,
Gives thee to make thy neighbour's blessing thine,
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to make
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race.

The Author hopes to be forgiven for these remarks: she has hazarded them for the sake of her more youthful readers.—She has not forgotten the time when, in the admiration of youthful enthusiasm, she never suspected that the principle of these finished verses was less excellent than the poetry.

The same pervading spirit which creates hostility between nations, creates animosity among neighbours, and discord in families. It is the same principle which, having in the beginning made "Cain the first male child," a murderer in his father's house, has been ever since in perpetual operation; has been transmitted in one unbroken line of succession, through that long chain of crimes of which history is composed, to the present triumphant spoiler of Europe.—In cultivated societies, laws repress, by punishing, the overt act in private individuals, but no one thing but the Christian religion has ever been devised to cleanse the spring.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" This proposition, this interrogation, we read with complacency, and both the aphorism and the question being a portion of scripture, we think it would not be decent to controvert it. We read it however with a secret reservation, that it is only the heart of all the rest of the world that is meant, and we rarely make the application which the Scripture intended. Each hopes that there is *one* heart which may escape the charge, and he makes the single exception in favour of his own. But if the exception which every one

makes were true, there would not be a deceitful or wicked heart in the world.

As a theory we are ready enough to admire self-knowledge, yet when the practice comes in question we are as blindfold as if our happiness depended on our ignorance. To lay hold on a religious truth, and to maintain our hold, is no easy matter. Our understandings are not more ready to receive than our affections to lose it. We like to have an intellectual knowledge of divine things, but to cultivate a spiritual acquaintance with them cannot be effected at so cheap a rate. We can even more readily force ourselves to believe that which has no affinity with our understanding, than we can bring ourselves to chuse that which has no interest in our will, no correspondence with our passions. One of the first duties of a Christian is to endeavour to conquer this antipathy to the self denying doctrines against which the human heart so sturdily holds out. The learned take incredible pains for the acquisition of knowledge. The philosopher cheerfully consumes the midnight oil in his laborious pursuits; he willingly sacrifices food and rest to conquer a difficulty in science. Here the labour is pleasant, the fatigue is grateful, the very difficulty is not without its charms. Why do we feel so differently in our religious

pursuits? Because in the most operose human studies, there is no contradiction of self, there is no opposition to the will, there is no combat of the affections. If the passions are at all implicated, if self love is at all concerned, it is rather in the way of gratification than of opposition.

There is such a thing as a mechanical Christianity. There are good imitations of religion, so well executed and so resembling as not only to deceive the spectator but the artist. Self-love in its various artifices to deceive us to our ruin, sometimes makes use of a means, which if properly used, is one of the most beneficial that can be devised to preserve us from its influence, the perusal of pious books.

But these very books in the hands of the ignorant, the indolent, and the self-satisfied, produce an effect directly contrary to that which they were intended to produce, and which they actually do produce on minds prepared for the perusal. They inflate where they were intended to humble. As some hypocondriacs, who amuse their melancholly hours with consulting indiscriminately every medical book which falls in their way, fancy they find their own case in every page, their own ailment in the ailment of every patient, till they believe they actually feel every

pain of which they read, though the work treats of cases diametrically opposite to their own—So the religious valetudinarian, as unreasonably elated as the others are depressed, reads books descriptive of a highly religious state, with the same unhappy self application. He feels his spiritual pulse by a watch, that has no movements in common with it, yet he fancies that they go exactly alike. He dwells with delight on symptoms, not one of which belongs to him, and flatters himself with their supposed agreement. He observes in those books what are the signs of grace, and he observes them with complete self application; he traces what are the evidences of being in God's favour, and those evidences he finds in himself.

Self-ignorance appropriates truths faithfully stated but wholly inapplicable. The presumption of the novice arrogates to itself the experience of the advanced Christian. He is persuaded that it is his own case and seizes on the consolations which belong only to the most elevated piety. Self-knowledge would correct the judgment. It would teach us to use the pattern held out as an original to copy, instead of leading us to fancy that we are already wrought into the assimilation. It would teach us when we read the history of an established Christian, to labour af-

ter a conformity to it, instead of mistaking it for the delineation of our own character.

Human prudence, daily experience, self-love, all teach us to distrust others, but all motives combined do not teach us to distrust ourselves; we confide unreservedly in our own heart, though as a guide it misleads, as a counsellor it betrays. It is both party and judge. As the one, it blinds through ignorance, as the other, it acquits through partiality.

Though we value ourselves upon our discretion in not confiding too implicitly in others, yet it would be difficult to find any friend, any neighbour, or even any enemy who has deceived us so often as we have deceived ourselves. If an acquaintance betray us, we take warning, are on the watch, and are careful not to trust him again. But however frequently the bosom traitor deceive and mislead, no such determined stand is made against his treachery: We lie as open to his next assault as if he had never betrayed us. We do not profit by the remembrance of the past delusion to guard against the future.

Yet if another deceive us, it is only in matters respecting this world, but we deceive ourselves in things of eternal moment. The treachery of others can only affect our fortune or our fame, or at worst our peace; but the internal traitor

may mislead us to our everlasting destruction. We are too much disposed to suspect others who probably have neither the inclination nor the power to injure us, but we seldom suspect our own heart though it possesses and employs both. We ought however fairly to distinguish between the simple vanity and the hypocrisy of self-love. Those who content themselves with talking as if the praise of virtue implied the practice, and who expect to be thought good, because they commend goodness, only propagate the deceit which has misled themselves, whereas hypocrisy does not even believe herself. She has deeper motives, she has designs to answer, competitions to promote, projects to effect. But mere vanity can subsist on the thin air of the admiration she solicits, without intending to get any thing by it. She is gratuitous in her loquacity; for she is ready to display her own merit to those who have nothing to give in return, whose applause brings no profit, and whose censure no disgrace.

It is not strange that we should judge of things not according to truth, but according to the opinion of others in cases foreign to ourselves, cases on which we have no correct means of determining; but we do it in things which relate immediately to ourselves, thus making not truth but the opinion of others our standard in points

which others cannot know, and of which we ought not to be ignorant. We are as fond of the applauses even of the upper gallery as the dramatic poet. Like him we affect to despise the mob considered as individual judges, yet as a mass, we covet their applause. Like him we feel strengthened by the number of voices in our favour, and are less anxious about the goodness of the work, than the loudness of the acclamation. Success is merit in the eye of both.

But even though we may put more refinement into our self-love, it is self love still. No subtlety of reasoning, no elegance of taste, though it may disguise the radical principle, can destroy it. We are still too much in love with flattery even though we may profess to despise that praise which depends on the acclamations of the vulgar. But if we are over anxious for the admiration of the better born and the better bred, this by no means proves that we are not vain, it only proves that our vanity has a better taste. Our appetite is not coarse enough perhaps to relish that popularity which ordinary ambition covets, but do we never feed in secret on the applauses of more distinguishing judges? Is not their having extolled *our* merit a confirmation of their discernment, and the chief ground of our high opinion of *theirs?*

But if any circumstance arise to induce them to change the too favourable opinion which they had formed of us, though their general character remain unimpeachable, and their general conduct as meritorious as when we most admired them, do we not begin to judge them unfavourably? Do we not begin to question their claim to that discernment which we had ascribed to them, to suspect the soundness of their judgment which we had so loudly commended? It is well if we do not entertain some doubt of the rectitude of their principles, as we probably do of the reality of their friendship. We do not candidly allow for the effect which prejudice, which misrepresentation, which party may produce even on an upright mind. Still less does it enter into our calculation that we may actually have deserved their disapprobation, that something in our conduct may have incurred the change in theirs.

It is no low attainment to detect this lurking injustice in our hearts, to strive against it, to pray against it, and especially to conquer it. We may reckon that we have acquired a sound principle of integrity when prejudice no longer blinds our judgment, nor resentment biasses our justice; when we do not make our opinion of another, depend on the opinion which we conceive he entertains of us. We must keep a just measure, and hold an even balance in judging of our-

selves as well as of others. We must have no false estimate which shall incline to condemnation without, or to partiality within. The examining principle must be kept sound or our determination will not be exact. It must be at once a testimony of our rectitude, and an incentive to it.

In order to improve this principle, we should make it a test of our sincerity to search out and to commend the good qualities of those who do not like us. But this must be done without affectation, and without insincerity. We must practise no false candour. If we are not on our guard we may be laying out for the praise of generosity, while we are only exercising a simple act of justice. These refinements of self-love are the dangers only of spirits of the higher order, but to such they are dangers.

The ingenuity of self-deceit is inexhaustible. If people extol us, we feel our good opinion of ourselves confirmed. If they dislike us, we do not think the worse of ourselves, but of them; it is not *we* who want merit but *they* who want penetration. If we cannot refuse them discernment, we persuade ourselves that they are not so much insensible to our worth as envious of it. There is no shift, stratagem, or device which we do not employ to make us stand well with ourselves.

We are too apt to calculate our own character unfairly in two ways, by referring to some one signal act of generosity, as if such acts were the common habit of our lives, and by treating our habitual faults, not as common habits, but occasional failures. There is carcely any fault in another which offends us more than vanity, though perhaps there is none that really injures us so little. We have no patience that another should be as full of self-love as we allow ourselves to be; so full of himself as to have little leisure to attend to us. We are particularly quick-sighted to the smallest of his imperfections which interferes with our self-esteem, while we are lenient to his more grave offences, which by not coming in contact with our vanity, do not shock our self-love.,

Is it not strange that though we love ourselves so much better than we love any other person, yet there is hardly one, however little we value him, that we had not rather be alone with, that we had not rather converse with, that we had not rather come to close quarters with, than ourselves? Scarcely one whose private history, whose thoughts, feelings, actions and motives we had not rather pry into than our own? Do we not use every art and contrivance to avoid getting at the truth of our own character? Do we not endeavour to keep ourselves ignorant of

what every one else knows respecting our faults, and do we not account that man our enemy, who takes on himself the best office of a friend, that of opening to us our real state and condition?

The little satisfaction people find when they faithfully look within, makes them fly more eagerly to things without. Early practice and long habit might conquer the repugnance to look at home, and the fondness for looking abroad. Familiarity often makes us pleased with the society which while strangers, we dreaded. Intimacy with ourselves might produce a similar effect.

We might perhaps collect a tolerably just knowledge of our own character, could we ascertain the *real* opinion of others respecting us; but that opinion being, except in a moment of resentment, carefully kept from us by our own precautions, profits us nothing. We do not chuse to know their secret sentiments, because we do not chuse to be cured of our error; because we "love darkness rather than light;" because we conceive that in parting with our vanity, we should part with the only comfort we have, that of being ignorant of our own faults.

Self-knowledge would materially contribute to our happiness, by curing us of that self-sufficiency which is continually exposing us to

mortifications. The hourly rubs and vexations which pride undergoes is far more than an equivalent for the short intoxications of pleasure which it snatches.

The enemy within is always in a confederacy with the enemy without, whether that enemy be the world or the devil. The domestic foe accommodates itself to their allurements, flatters our weaknesses, throws a veil over our vices, tarnishes our good deeds, gilds our bad ones, hoodwinks our judgment, and works hard to conceal our internal springs of action.

Self love has the talent of imitating whatever the world admires even though it should happen to be the Christian virtues. It leads us from our regard to reputation to avoid all vices, not only which would bring punishment but discredit by the commission. It can even assume the zeal and copy the activity of Christian charity. It communicates to our conduct those proprieties and graces, manifested in the conduct of those who are actuated by a sounder motive. The difference lies in the ends proposed. The object of the one is to please God, of the other to obtain the praise of man.

Self-love judging of the feelings of others by its own, is aware that nothing excites so much odium as its own character would do, if nakedly

exhibited. We feel, by our own disgust at its exhibition in others, how much disgust we ourselves should excite did we not invest it with the soft garb of gentle manners and a polished address. When therefore we would not condescend "to take the lowest place, to think others better than ourselves, to be courteous and pitiful," on the true Scripture ground, politeness steps in as the accredited substitute of humility, and the counterfeit brilliant is willingly worn by those who will not be at the expense of the jewel.

There is a certain elegance of mind which will often restrain a well-bred man from sordid pleasures and gross voluptuousness. He will be led by his good taste perhaps not only to abhor the excesses of vice, but to admire the theory of virtue. But it is only the *crapule* of vice which he will abhor. Exquisite gratifications, sober luxury, incessant but not unmeasured enjoyment, form the principle of his plan of life, and if he observe a temperance in his pleasures, it is only because excess would take off the edge, destroy the zest, and abridge the gratification. By resisting gross vice he flatters himself that he is a temperate man and that he has made all the sacrifices which self-denial imposes. Inwardly satisfied he compares himself with those who have sunk into coarser indulgences, enjoys his

own superiority in health, credit and unimpaired faculties, and triumphs in the dignity of his own character.

There is, if the expression may be allowed, a sort of religious self-deceit, an affectation of humility which is in reality full of self, which is entirely occupied with self, which resolves all importance into what concerns self, which only looks at things as they refer to self. This religious vanity operates in two ways.—We not only fly out at the imputation of the smallest individual fault, while at the same time we affect to charge ourselves with more corruption than is attributed to us ; but on the other hand, while we are lamenting our general want of all goodness, we fight for every particle that is disputed. The one quality that is in question always happens to be the very one to which we *must* lay claim, however deficient in others.—Thus, while renouncing the pretension to every virtue, " we depreciate ourselves into all." We had rather talk even of our faults than not occupy the foreground of the canvas.

Humility does not consist in telling our faults, but in bearing to be told of them, in hearing them patiently and even thankfully ; in correcting ourselves when told, in not hating those who tell us of them. If we were little in our own

eyes, and felt our real insignificance, we should avoid false humility as much as mere obvious vanity; but we seldom dwell on our faults except in a general way, and rarely on those of which we are really guilty. We do it in the hope of being contradicted, and thus of being confirmed in the secret good opinion we entertain of ourselves. It is not enough that we inveigh against ourselves, we must in a manner forget ourselves. This oblivion of self from a pure principle would go further towards our advancement in Christian virtue than the most splendid actions performed on the opposite ground.

That self-knowledge which teaches us humility teaches us compassion also. The sick pity the sick. They sympathize with the disorder of which they feel the symptoms in themselves. Self-knowledge also checks injustice by establishing the equitable principle of shewing the kindness we expect to receive; it represses ambition by convincing us how little we are entitled to superiority; it renders adversity profitable by letting us see how much we deserve it; it makes prosperity safe, by directing our hearts to him who confers it, instead of receiving it as the consequence of our own desert.

We even carry our self-importance to the foot of the throne of God. When prostrate there we are not required, it is true, to forget ourselves, but we are required to remember HIM. We have indeed much sin to lament, but we have also much mercy to adore. We have much to ask, but we have likewise much to acknowledge: Yet our infinite obligations to God do not fill our hearts half as much as a petty uneasiness of our own; nor HIS infinite perfections as much as our own smallest want.

The great, the only effectual antidote to self-love is to get the love of God and of our neighbour firmly rooted in the heart. Yet let us ever bear in mind that dependence on our fellow creatures is as carefully to be avoided as love of them is to be cultivated. There is none but God on whom the principles of love and dependence form but one duty.

CHAP. XIV.]

ON THE CONDUCT OF CHRISTIANS IN THEIR INTERCOURSE WITH THE IRRELIGIOUS.

THE combination of integrity with discretion is the precise point at which a serious Christian must aim in his intercourse, and especially in his debates on religion, with men of the opposite description. He must consider himself as not only having his own reputation but the honour of religion in his keeping. While he must on the one hand "set his face as a flint" against any thing that may be construed into compromise or evasion, into denying or concealing any Christian truth, or shrinking from any commanded duty, in order to conciliate favour; he must, on the other hand, be scrupulously careful never to maintain a Christian doctrine with an unchristian temper. In endeavoring to convince he must be cautious not needlessly to irritate. He must

distinguish between the honour of God and the pride of his own character, and never be pertinaciously supporting the one, under the pretence that he is only maintaining the other. The dislike thus excited against the disputant is at once transferred to the principle, and the adversary's unfavourable opinion of religion is augmented by the faults of its champion. At the same time the intemperate champion puts it out of his power to be of any future service to the man whom his offensive manners have disgusted.

A serious Christian, it is true, feels an honest indignation at hearing those truths on which his everlasting hopes depend, lightly treated. He cannot but feel his heart rise at the affront offered to his Maker. But instead of calling down fire from heaven on the reviler's head, he will raise a secret supplication to the God of heaven in his favour, which, if it change not the heart of his opponent, will not only tranquilize his own, but soften it towards his adversary; for we cannot easily hate the man for whom we pray.

He who advocates the sacred cause of Christianity should be particularly aware of fancying that his being religious will atone for his being disagreeable; that his orthodoxy will justify his uncharitableness, or his zeal make up for his indiscretion. He must not persuade himself that

he has been serving God, when he has only been gratifying his own resentment; when he has actually by a fiery defence prejudiced the cause which he might perhaps have advanced by temperate argument, and persuasive mildness. Even a judicious silence under great provocation is, in a warm temper, real forbearance. And though "to keep silence from good words" may be pain and grief, yet the pain and grief must be borne, and the silence must be observed.

We sometimes see imprudent religionists glory in the attacks which their own indiscretion has invited. With more vanity than truth they apply the strong and ill chosen term of persecution, to the sneers and ridicule which some impropriety of manner or some inadvertency of their own has occasioned. Now and then it is to be feared the censure may be deserved, and the high professor may possibly be but an indifferent moralist. Even a good man, a point we are not sufficiently ready to concede, may have been blameable in some instance, on which his censurers will naturally have kept a keen eye. On these occasions how forcibly does the pointed caution recur, which was implied by the divine moralist on the mount, and enforced by the Apostle Peter, to distinguish for whose sake we are calumniated.

By the way this sharp look out of worldly men on the professors of religion, is not without very important uses. While it serves to promote circumspection in the real Christian; the detection to which it leads in the case of the hollow professor, forms a broad and useful line of distinction between two classes of characters so essentially distinct, and yet so frequently, so unjustly, and so malevolently confounded.

The world believes, or at least affects to believe, that the correct and elegant minded religious man is blind to those errors and infirmities, that eccentricity and bad taste, that propensity to diverge from the strait line of prudence, which is discernible in some pious but ill-judging men, and which delight and gratify the enemies of true piety, as furnishing them with so plausible a ground for censure. But if the more judicious and better informed Christian bears with these infirmities, it is not that he does not clearly perceive and entirely condemn them. But he bears with what he disapproves for the sake of the zeal, the sincerity, the general usefulness of these defective characters: These good qualities are totally overlooked by the censurer, who is ever on the watch to aggravate the failings which christian charity laments without extenuating. It bears with them from the belief that impro-

priety is less mischievous than carelessness, a bad judgment than a bad heart, and some little excesses of zeal than gross immorality, or total indifference.

We are not ignorant how much truth itself offends, though unassociated with any thing that is displeasing. This furnishes an important rule not to add to the unavoidable offence, by mixing the faults of our own character with the cause we support; because we may be certain that the enemy will take care never to separate them. He will always voluntarily maintain the pernicious association in his own mind. He will never think or speak of religion without connecting with it the real or imputed bad qualities of all the religious men he knows or has heard of.

Let not then the friends of truth unnecessarily increase the number of her enemies. Let her not have at once to sustain the assaults to which her divine character inevitably subjects her, and the obloquy to which the infirmities and foibles of her injudicious, and if there are any such, her unworthy champions expose her.

But we sometimes justify our rash violence under colour that our correct piety cannot endure the faults of others. The Pharisees overflowing with wickedness themselves, made the

exactness of their own virtue a pretence for looking with horror on the publicans, whom our Saviour regarded with compassionate tenderness, while he reprobated with keen severity the sins and especially the censoriousness of their accusers. "Charity," says an admirable French writer, "is that law which Jesus Christ came down to bring into the world, to repair the divisions which sin has introduced into it; to be the proof of the reconciliation of man with God, by bringing him into obedience to the divine law; to reconcile him to himself by subjugating his passions to his reason; and in fine to reconcile him to all mankind, by curing him of the desire to domineer over them."

But we put it out of our power to become the instruments of God in promoting the spiritual good of any one, if we stop up the avenue to his heart by violence or imprudence. We not only put it out of our power to do good to all whom we disgust, but are we not liable to some responsibility for the failure of all the good we might have done them, had we not forfeited our influence by our indiscretion? What we do not to others in relieving their spiritual as well as bodily wants, Christ will punish as not having been done to himself. This is one of the cases in which our own reputation is so inseparably

connected with that of religion, that we should be tender of one for the sake of the other.

The modes of doing good in society are various. We should sharpen our discernment to discover them, and our zeal to put them in practice. If we cannot open a man's eyes to the truth of religion by our arguments, we may perhaps open them to its beauty by our moderation. Though he may dislike Christianity in itself, he may, from admiring the forbearance of the Christian, be at last led to admire the principle from which it flowed. If he have hitherto refused to listen to the written evidences of religion, the temper of her advocate may be a new evidence of so engaging a kind, that his heart may be opened by the sweetness of the one to the verities of the other. He will at least be brought to allow that that religion cannot be very bad, the fruits of which are so amiable. The conduct of the disciple may in time bring him to the feet of the master. A new combination may be formed in his mind. He may begin to see what he had supposed antipathies, reconciled, to unite two things which he thought as impossible to be brought together as the two poles, he may begin to couple candour with Christianity.

But if the mild advocate fail to convince, he may persuade; even if he fail to persuade, he will at least leave on the mind of the adversary such favourable impressions, as may induce him to enquire farther. He may be able to employ on some future occasion, to more effectual purpose, the credit which his forbearance will have obtained for him, whereas uncharitable vehehemence will probably have forever shut the ears and closed the heart of his opponent against any future intercourse.

But even if the temperate pleader should not be so happy as to produce any considerable effect on the mind of his antagonist, he is in any case promoting the interests of his own soul; he is at least imitating the faith and patience of the saints; he is cultivating that "meek and quiet spirit" of which his blessed master gave at once the rule, the injunction and the praise.

If "all bitterness and clamour and malice and evil speaking" are expressly forbidden in ordinary cases, surely the prohibition must more peculiarly apply to the case of religious controversialists. Suppose Voltaire and Hume had been left to take their measure of our religion (as one would really suppose they had) from the defences of Christianity by their very able contemporary Bishop Warburton.—When they

saw this Goliath in talents and learning, dealing about his ponderous blows, attacking with the same powerful weapons, not the enemies only, but the friends of Christianity, who happened to see some points in a different light from himself; not meeting them as his opponents, but pouncing on them as his prey, not seeking to defend himself, but tearing them to pieces; waging offensive war, delighting in unprovoked hostility—when they saw him thus advocate the christian cause with a spirit diametrically opposite to Christianity, would they not exultingly exclaim, in direct opposition to the exclamation of the apostolic age, "see how these Christians *hate* one another!" Whereas had his vast powers of mind and astonishing compass of knowledge ben sanctified by the angelic meekness of Archbishop Leighton, they would have been compelled to acknowledge, if Christianity be false, it is after all so amiable that it deserves to be true. Might they not have applied to these two prelates what was said of Bossuet and Fenelon, "*l'un prouve la Religion, l'autre la fait aimer.*"

If we studiously contrived how to furnish the most complete triumph to infidels, contentious theology would be our best contrivance. They enjoy the wounds the combatants inflict on each

other, not so much from the personal injury which either might sustain, as from the conviction that every attack, however it may terminate, weakens the common cause. In all engagements with a foreign foe, they know that Christianity *must* come off triumphantly. All their hopes are founded on a civil war.

If a forbearing temper should be maintained towards the irreligious, how much more by the professors of religion towards each other. As it is a lamentable instance of human infirmity that there is often much hostility carried on by good men who profess the same faith; so it is a striking proof of the litigious nature of man that this spirit is less excited by broad distinctions, (such as conscience ought not to reconcile) than by shades of opinion, shades so few and slight, that the world would not know they existed at all, if by their animosities the disputants were not so impatient to inform it.

While we should never withhold a clear and honest avowal of the great principles of our religion, let us discreetly avoid dwelling on inconsiderable distinctions, on which, as they do not affect the essentials either of faith or practice, we may allow another to maintain his opinion, while we steadily hold fast our own. But in religious as in military warfare, it almost seems as

if the hostility were great in proportion to the littleness of the point contested. We all remember when two great nations were on the point of being involved in war for a spot of ground* in another hemisphere, so little known that the very name had scarcely reached us; so inconsiderable that its possession would have added nothing to the strength of either. In civil too, as well as in national and theological disputes, there is often most stress laid on the most indifferent things. Why would the Spanish Government some years ago so little consult the prejudices of the people, as nearly to produce an insurrection, by issuing an edict for them to relinquish the ancient national dress? Why was the security of the state, and the lives of the subjects put to hazard for a cloak and a jerkin? For the obstinate people made as firm a stand against this trifling requisition, as they could have made for the preservation of their civil or religious liberty, if they had been so happy as to possess either—a stand as firm as they are now nobly making in defence of their country and their independence.

Without invidiously enumerating any of the narrowing names which split Christianity in pieces, and which so unhappily drive the subjects

* Nootka Sound.

of the Prince of peace into interminable war, and range them into so many hostile bands, not against the common enemy, but against each other; we cannot forbear regretting that less temper is preserved amongst these near neighbours in local situation and in christian truth, than if the attack of either were levelled at Jews, Turks, or Infidels.

Is this that catholic spirit which embraces with the love of charity, though not of approbation, the whole offspring of our common Father —which in the arms of its large affection, without vindicating their faults or adopting their opinions, "takes every creature in of every kind," and which like its gracious Author, "would not that any thing should perish?"

The preference of remote to approximating opinions is, however, by no means confined to the religious world. The author of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, though so passionate an admirer of the prophet of Arabia as to raise a suspicion of his own Islamism; though so rapturous an eulogist of the apostate Julian as to raise a suspicion of his own polytheism, yet with an inconsistency not uncommon to unbelief he treats the stout orthodoxy of the vehement Athanasius, with more respect than he shews to the "scanty creed" of a contemporary

philosopher and theologian, whose cold and comfortless doctrines were much less removed from his own.

Might not the twelve monsters which even the incredible strength and labour of Hercules found so hard to subdue, be interpreted as an ingenious allegory, by which were meant twelve popular prejudices? But though the hero went forth armed preternaturally, the goddess of wisdom herself furnishing him with his helmet, and the god of eloquence with his arrows, yet it is not certain that he conquered the *religious* prejudices, not of the world, but even of Argos and Mycenæ; at least they were not among his earlier conquests; they were not serpents which an *infant* hand could strangle. They were more probably the fruitful hydra, which lost nothing by losing a head, a new head always starting up to supply the incessant decapitation. But though he slew the animal at last, might not its envenomed gore in which his arrows were dipped be the perennial fountain in which persecuting bigotry, harsh intolerance, and polemical acrimony, have continued to dip their pens?

It is a delicate point to hit upon, neither to vindicate the truth in so coarse a manner as to excite a prejudice against it, nor to make any concessions in the hope of obtaining popularity.

"If it be possible as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" can no more mean that we should exercise that false candour which conciliates at the expence of sincerity, than that we should defend truth with so intolerant a spirit, as to injure the cause by discrediting the advocate.

As the apostle beautifully obtests his brethren, not by the power and dignity, but "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ," so every christian should adorn his doctrine by the same endearing qualities, evincing by the brightness of the polish, the solidity of the substance. But he will carefully avoid adopting the external appearance of these amiable tempers as substitutes for piety, when they are only its ornaments. Condescending manners may be one of the numberless modifications of selfishness, and reputation is thus often obtained, where it is not fairly earned. Carefully to examine whether he please others for their good to edification, or in order to gain praise and popularity, is the bounden duty of a christian.

We should not be angry with the blind for not seeing, nor with the proud for not acknowledging their blindness. We ourselves perhaps were once as blind; happy if we are not still as proud. If not in this instance, in others perhaps they might have made more of our advantages than

we have done; we, under their circumstances, might have been more perversely wrong than they are, had we not been treated by the enlightened with more patient tenderness than we are disposed to exercise towards them. Tyre and Sidon we are assured by Truth itself, would have repented, had they enjoyed the privileges which Chorazin and Bethsaida threw away. Surely we may do that for the love of God, and for the love of our opponent's soul, which well-bred men do through a regard to politeness. Why should a christian be more ready to offend against the rule of charity than a gentleman against the law of decorum? Candour in judging is like disinterestedness in acting; both are statutes of the royal law.

There is also a kind of right which men feel they possess to their own opinion. With this right it is often more difficult to part than even with the opinion itself. If our object be the real good of our opponent; if it be to promote the cause of truth, and not to contest for victory, we shall remember this. We shall consider what a value we put upon our own opinion: why should his, though a false one, be less dear to him, if he believes it true? This consideration will teach us not to expect too much at first. It will teach us the prudence of seeking some general point, in which we cannot

fail to agree. This will let him see that we do not differ from him for the sake of differing; which conciliating spirit of ours may bring him to a temper to listen to arguments on topics where our disagreement is wider.

In disputing, for instance, with those who wholly reject the divine authority of the scriptures, we can gain nothing by quoting them, and insisting vehemently on the proof which is to be drawn from them, in support of the point in debate; their unquestionable truth availing nothing with those who do not allow it. But if we take some common ground on which both the parties can stand, and reason from the analogies of natural religion, and the way in which God proceeds in the known and acknowledged course of his providence, to the way in which he deals with us, and has declared he will deal with us, as the God revealed in the Bible: our opponent may be struck with the similarity and be put upon a track of consideration, and be brought to a temper *in* considering which may terminate in the happiest manner. He may be brought at length to be less averse from listening to us, on those grounds and principles of which probably he might otherwise never have seen the value.

Where a disputant of another description cannot endure what he sneeringly calls the strict-

ness of evangelical religion, he will have no objection to acknowledge the momentous truths of man's responsibility to his Maker, of the omniscience, omnipresence, majesty, and purity of God. Strive then to meet him on these grounds, and respectfully enquire if he can sincerely affirm that he is acting up to the truths he acknowleges?—If he is living in all respects as an accountable being ought to live?—If he is really conscious of acting as a being ought to act, who knows that he is continually acting under the eye of a just and holy God? You will find he cannot stand on these grounds. Either he must be contented to receive the truth as revealed in the Gospel, or be convicted of inconsistency, or self deceit, or hypocrisy. You will at least drive him off his own ground which he will find untenable, if you cannot bring him over to yours. But while the enemy is effecting his retreat, do not you cut off the means of his return.

Some Christians approve christianity as it is knowlege, rather than as it is principle. They like it as it yields a grand object of pursuit; as it enlarges their view of things, as it opens to them a wider field of enquiry, a fresh source of discovery, an additional topic of critical investigation. They consider it rather as extending the limits of their research, than as a means of

ennobling their affections. It furnishes their understanding with a fund of riches on which they are eager to draw, not so much for the improvement of the heart as of the intellect. They consider it as a thesis on which to raise interesting discussion, rather than as premises from which to draw practical conclusions, as an incontrovertible truth, rather than as a rule of life.

There is something in the exhibition of sacred subjects given us by these persons, which according to our conception, is not only mistaken but pernicious. We refer to their treatment of religion as a mere science divested of its practical application, and taken rather as a code of philosophical speculations than of active principles. To explain our meaning, we might perhaps venture to except against the choice of topics almost exclusively made by these writers.

After they have spent half a life upon the evidences, the mere vestibule, so necessary, we allow, to be passed into the Temple of Christianity, we accompany them into *their* edifice, and find it composed of materials but too coincident with their former taste. Questions of criticism, of grammar, of history, of metaphysics, of mathematics, and of all the sciences meet us, in the very place of that which Saint Paul tells us "is the end of all"—that is, "Charity out of a pure

heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, from which" he adds "some having swerved, have turned aside to vain jangling*."

We are very far from applying the latter term to all scientific discussions in religion, of which we should be the very last to deny the use, or question the necessity. Our main objection lies to the preponderance given to such topics by our controversialists in their divinity, and to the spirit too often manifested in their discussions. A preponderance it is, which makes us sometimes fear they consider these things rather as religion itself, than as helps to understand it, as the substitutes, not the allies of devotion. At the same time, a cold and philosophical spirit often studiously maintained, seems to confirm the suspicion, that religion with them is not accidentally, but essentially, and solely an exercise of the wits, and a field for the display of intellectual prowess—as if the salvation of souls were a thing by the bye.

These prize fighters in theology remind us of the philosophers of other schools: we feel as if

* See 1 Tim. 1, 5, 6, also verse 4, in which the apostle hints at certain "fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is by faith." We dare not say how closely this description applies to some modern controversists in theology.

we were reading Newton against Des Cartes, or the theory of caloric in opposition to phlogiston. "Nous le regardons," says the eloquent Saurin upon some religious subject "pour la plupart, de la même maniere, dont on envisage les idés d'un ancien Philosophe sur le gouvernement."—The practical part of religion in short is forgotten, is lost in its theories: and what is worst of all, a temper hostile to the spirit of Christianity is employed to defend or illustrate its positions.

This latter effect might be traced beyond the foregoing causes, to another nearly allied to them —the habit of treating religion as a science capable of demonstration. On a subject evidently admitting but of moral evidence, we lament to see questions dogmatically proved, instead of being temperately argued. Nay we could almost smile at the sight of some intricate and barren novelty in religion *demonstrated* to the satisfaction of some one ingenious theorist, who draws upon himself instantly a hundred confutations of every position he maintains. The ulterior stages of the debate are often such as might "make angels weep." And when we remember that even in the most important questions, involving eternal interests, "probability is the very guide of life*" we could most devoutly

* Butler's Introduction to "The Analogy."

wish, that on subjects, to say the least, not "generally necessary to salvation" infallibility were not the claim of the disputant, or personal animosity the condition of his failure.

Such speculatists who are more anxious to make proselytes to an opinion, than converts to a principle, will not be so likely to convince an opponent, as the christian who is known to act up to his convictions, and whose genuine piety will put life and heart into his reasonings. The opponent probably knows already all the ingenious arguments which books supply. Ingenuity therefore, if he be a candid man, will not be so likely to touch him, as that "godly sincerity" which he cannot but perceive the heart of his antagonist is dictating to his lips. There is a simple energy in pure christian truth which a factitious principle imitates in vain. The "knowledge which puffeth up" will make few practical converts unaccompanied with the "charity which edifieth."

To remove prejudices, then, is the bounden duty of a Christian, but he must take care not to remove them by conceding what integrity forbids him to concede. He must not wound his conscience to save his credit. If an ill-bred roughness disgusts another, a dishonest complaisance undoes himself. He must remove all ob-

structions to the reception of truth, but the truth itself he must not adulterate. In clearing away the impediment, he must secure the principle.

If his own reputation be attacked, he must defend it by every lawful means; nor will he sacrifice the valuable possession to any demand but that of conscience, to any call but the imperative call of duty. If his good name be put in competition with any other earthly good, he will preserve it, however dear may be the good he relinquishes; but, if the competition lie between his reputation and his conscience, he has no hesitation in making the sacrifice, costly as it is. A feeling man struggles for his fame as for his life, but if he be a Christian, he parts with it, for he knows that it is not the life of his soul.

For the same reason that we must not be over anxious to vindicate our fame, we must be careful to preserve it from any unjust imputation. The great Apostle of the Gentiles has set us an admirable example in both respects, and we should never consider him in one point of view, without recollecting his conduct in the other. So profound is his humility that he declares himself "less than the least of all saints." Not content with this comparative depreciation, he proclaims his actual corruptions. "In me, that is, in my flesh, there is no good thing." Yet this deep self-abasement did not prevent him

from asserting his own calumniated worth, from declaring that he was not behind the very "chiefest of the Apostles"—again—"As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting," &c. He then enumerates with a manly dignity, tempered with a noble modesty, a multitude of instances of his unparalleled sufferings and his unrivalled zeal.

Where only his own personal feelings were in question, how self-abasing! how self-annihilating! but where the unjust imputation involved the honour of Christ and the credit of religion "what carefulness it wrought in him, yea what clearing of himself; yea what indignation, yea what vehement desire, yea what zeal!"

While we rejoice in the promises annexed to the beatitudes, we should be cautious of applying to ourselves promises which do not belong to us, particularly that which is attached to the last beatitude. When our fame is attacked, let us carefully inquire, if we are "suffering for righteousness' sake," or for our own faults; let us examine, whether we may not deserve the censures we have incurred? Even if we are suffering in the cause of God, may we not have brought discredit on that holy cause by our imprudence, our obstinacy, our vanity; by our zeal without knowledge, and our earnestness without temper?

Let us inquire, whether our revilers have not some foundation for the charge? Whether we have not sought our own glory more than that of God? Whether we are not more disappointed at missing that revenue of praise, which we thought our good works were entitled to bring us in, than at the wound religion may have sustained? Whether though our views were right on the whole, their purity was not much alloyed by human mixtures? Whether, neglecting to count the cost, we did not expect unmixed approbation, uninterrupted success, and a full tide of prosperity and applause, totally forgetting the reproaches received, and the obloquy sustained by "the Man of Sorrows."

If we can, on an impartial review, acquit ourselves as to the general purity of our motives, the general integrity of our conduct, the unfeigned sincerity of our endeavours, then we may indeed, though with deep humility, take to ourselves the comfort of this divine beatitude. When we really find, that men only speak evil of us for *his* sake in whose cause we have laboured, however that labour may have been mingled with imperfection, we may indeed "rejoice and be exceeding glad." Submission may be elevated into gratitude, and forgiveness into love.

CHAP. XV.

ON THE PROPRIETY OF INTRODUCING RELIGION IN GENERAL CONVERSATION.

MAY we be allowed to introduce here an opinion warmly maintained in the world, and which indeed strikes at the root of all rules for the management of religious debate recommended in the preceding chapter? It is, that the subject of religion ought on no occasion to be introduced in mixed company; that the diversity of sentiment upon it is so great, and so nearly connected with the tenderest feelings of our minds, as to be liable to lead to heat and contention: Finally, that it is too grave and solemn a topic to be mixed in the miscellaneous circle of social discourse, much less in the festive effusions of convivial cheerfulness. Now, in answer to these allegations, we must at least insist, that should religion, on other grounds, be found entitled to social discussion, the last observation, if true, would prove convivial cheerfulness incompatible

with the spirit and practice of religion, rather than religion inadmissible into cheerful parties. And it is certainly a retort difficult of evasion, that where to introduce religion herself is to endanger her honour, there she rather suffers in reputation by the presence of her friend. The man endeared by conviction to his religion will never bear to be long, much less to be statedly separated from the object of his affections: and he whose zeal once determined him "to know *nothing*" amongst his associates, "but Jesus Christ, and him crucified," never could have dreamt of a latitude of interpretation which would admit a Christian into scenes where *every thing* but Jesus Christ and him crucified, might be recognized with credit.

These principles appear so plain and incontrovertible, that the question seems rather to call for a different statement: viz. why religion should not be deemed admissible into every social meeting and friendly circle in which a Christian himself would chuse to be found? That it is too weighty and important a subject for discussion, is an argument, which, standing alone, assumes the gross absurdity that either men never talk of that which most nearly interests them, or that when they do, they talk improperly. They will not, it is true, introduce a private concern, how-

ever important, in which no one is interested but themselves. But in the subject of religion, who is not interested? Or where will topics be found more universal in their application to all times, persons, places and circumstances, as well as more important, than those which relate to the eternal welfare of mankind?

Nor will it be avowed with greater colour of reason, that topics so important suffer in point of gravity, or in the respect of mankind, by frequent discussion. We never observed men grow indifferent to their health, their affairs, their friends, their country, in proportion as these were made the subjects of their familiar discourse. On the contrary, oblivion has been noticed as the offspring of silence. The man who never mentions his friend is, we think, in general most likely to forget him. And far from deeming the name of ONE, greater than any earthly friend "taken in vain," when mentioned discreetly in conversation, we generally find him most remembered and respected in secret, by those whose memories are occasionally refreshed by a reference to his word and authority in public. "Familiarity," indeed, we have been told, "produces contempt;" a truism, on which we are convinced many persons, honestly, tho' blindly, rest their habitual, and even systematic reserve on religious subjects. But "familiarity"

in our mind has reference rather to the manner, than to the act, of introducing religion. To us it is synonimous with a certain trite and trivial repetition of serious remarks, evidently "to no profit," which we sometimes hear from persons familiarized, rather by education than feeling, to the language of piety.

More particularly we refer it to a still more criminal habit, which, to their disgrace, some professors of religion share with the profane, of raising a laugh by the introduction of a religious observation or even a scriptural quotation. "To court a grin when we should woo a soul," is surely an abuse of religion, as well in the parlour as the pulpit. Nor has the senate itself been always exempt from this impropriety. Dr. Johnson has long since pronounced a jest drawn from the Bible, the vulgarest because the easiest of all jests.—And far from perverting religious topics to such a purpose himself, a feeling Christian would not often be found, where such would be the probable consequence of offering a pious sentiment in company.

That allusions involving religious questions are often productive of dispute and altercation, is a fact, which though greatly exaggerated, must yet, in a degree be admitted. This circumstance may in some measure account for the singular reception which a religious remark is often ob-

served to meet with in the world. It is curious to notice the surprise and alarm which, on such occasions, will frequently pervade the party present. The remark is received as a stranger-guest, of which no one knows the quality or intentions: And, like a species of intellectual foundling, it is cast upon the company without a friend to foster its infancy, or to own any acquaintance with the parent. A fear of consequences prevails. It is obvious that the feeling is—"We know not into what it may grow; it is therefore safer to stifle it in the birth." This, if not the avowed, is the implied sentiment.

But is not this delicacy, this *mauvaise honte*, so peculiar perhaps to our countrymen on religious subjects, the very cause which operates so unfavourably upon that effect which it labours to obviate? Is not the very infrequency of moral or religious observations, a sufficient account to be given both of the perplexity and the irritation said to be consequent upon their introduction? And were not religion (we mean such religious topics as may legitimately arise in mixed society) banished so much as it is from conversation, might not its occasional recurrence become by degrees as natural, perhaps as interesting, certainly as instructive, and after all as safe, as "a close committee on the weather," or any other of the authorised topics which

are about as productive of amusement as of instruction? People act as if Religion were to be regarded at a distance, as if even a respectful ignorance were to be preferred to a more familiar approach. This reserve, however, does not give an air of respect, so much as of mystery, to Religion. An able writer* has observed, "*that* was esteemed the most sacred part of pagan devotion which was the most impure, and the only thing that was commendable in it is, that it was kept a great mystery." He approves of nothing in this religion but the modesty of withdrawing itself from the eyes of the world.—But Christianity requires not to be shrouded in any such mysterious recesses. She does not, like the Eastern monarchs, owe her dignity to her concealment. She is, on the contrary, most honoured where most known, and most revered where most clearly visible.

It will be obvious that hints rather than arguments belong to our present undertaking. In this view we may perhaps be excused if we offer a few general observations upon the different occasions on which a well-regulated mind would be solicitous to introduce religion into social discourse. The person possessed of such a mind, would be mainly anxious, in a society of christians, that something should ap-

* Bishop Sherlock.

pear indicative of their profession. He would accordingly feel a strong desire to effect it when he plainly perceived his company engaged on no other topic either innocently entertaining, or rationally instructive. This desire, however, would by no means cloud his brow, give an air of impatience to his countenance, or render him inattentive to the general tone and temper of the circle. On the contrary, he would endeavour to feel additional interest in his neighbour's suggestions, in proportion as he hoped in turn to attract notice to his own. He would shew long forbearance to the utmost extent of conscientious toleration. In the prosecution of his favourite design, he would never attempt a forced or unseasonable allusion to serious subjects; a caution requiring the nicest judgment and discrimination, most particularly where he felt the sentiments or the zeal of his company to be not congenial with his own. His would be the spirit of the prudent mariner, who does not approach even his native shore without carefully watching the winds, and sounding the channels; knowing well that a temporary delay, even on an unfriendly element, is preferable to a hasty landing his company, on shore indeed, but upon the point of a rock.

Happily for our present purpose, the days we live in afford circumstances both of foreign

and domestic occurrence, of every possible variety of colour and connection, so as to leave scarcely any mind unfurnished with a store of progressive remarks by which the most instructive truths may be approached through the most obvious topics. And a prudent mind will study to make its approaches to such an ultimate object, progressive : it will know also where to stop, rather indeed out of regard to others than to itself. And in the manly avowal of its sentiments, avoiding as well what is canting in utterance as technical in language, it will make them at once appear not the ebullition of an ill-educated imagination, but the result of a long-exercised understanding.

Nothing will be more likely to attract attention or secure respect to your remarks than the good taste in which they are delivered. On common topics we reckon him the most elegant speaker whose pronunciation and accent are so free from all peculiarities that it cannot be determined to what place he owes his birth. A polished critic of Rome accuses one of the finest of her historians of provinciality. This is a fault obvious to less enlightened critics, since the Attic herb-woman could detect the provincial dialect of a great philosopher. Why must religion have her *Patavinity?* Why must a Christian adopt the quaintness of

a party, or a scholar the idiom of the illiterate? Why should a valuable truth be combined with a vulgar or fanatical expression? If either would offend when separate, how inevitably must they disgust when the one is mistakenly intended to set off the other. Surely this is not enchasing our "apples of gold in pictures of silver."

We must not close this part of our subject without alluding to another, and still more delicate introduction of religion, in the way of *reproof*. Here is indeed a point in religious conduct to which we feel it a boldness to make any reference at all. Bold, indeed, is that casuist who would lay down general rules on a subject where the consciences of men seem to differ so widely from each other: and feeble too often will be his justest rules where the feelings of timidity or delicacy rush in with a force which sweeps down many a land-mark erected for its own guidance, even by conscience itself.

Certainly, much allowance, perhaps respect, is due in cases of very doubtful decision, to those feelings which, after the utmost self-regulation of mind, are found to be irresistible. And certainly the habits and modes of address attached to refined society, are such as to place personal observations on a very different foot-

ing to that on which they stand by nature.—A frown, even a cold and disapproving look, may be a reception which the profane expression or loose action of a neighbour of rank and opulence may have never before encountered from his flatterers or convivial companions. A vehement censure in his case might inflame his resentment without amending his fault. Whether the attempt be to correct a vice or rectify an error, one object should ever be steadily kept in view, to conciliate rather than to contend, to inform but not to insult, to evince that we assume not the character of a dictator, but the office of a christian friend; that we have the best interests of the offender, and the honour of religion at heart, and that to reprove is so far from a gratification that it is a trial to ourselves; the effort of conscience, not the effect of choice.

The feelings, therefore, of the person to be admonished should be most scrupulously consulted. The admonition, if necessarily strong, explicit, and personal, should yet be friendly, temperate, and well bred. An offence, even though publicly committed, is generally best reproved in private, perhaps in writing.—Age, superiority of station, previous acquaintance, above all, that sacred profession to which the honour of religion is happily made a personal concern, are circumstances which especially

call for, and sanction the attempt recommended. And he must surely be unworthy his Christian vocation, who would not conscientiously use any influence or authority which he might chance to possess, in discountenancing or rectifying the delinquency he condemns.

We are, indeed, as elsewhere, after the closest reflection and longest discussion, often forced into the general conclusion that "a good heart is the best casuist." And doubtless, where true Christian benevolence towards man meets in the same mind with an honest zeal for the glory of God, a way will be found, let us rather say will be opened, for the right exercise of this, as of every virtuous disposition.

Let us ever remember what we have so often insisted on, that self-denial is the groundwork, the indispensable requisite for every Christian virtue; that without the habitual exercise of this principle we shall never be followers of him "who pleased not himself." And when we are called by conscience to the largest use of it in practice, we must arm ourselves with the highest considerations for the trial: we must consider him, who (through his faithful reproofs) "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself." And when even from Moses we hear the truly evangelical precept, "thou

shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him;" we must duly weigh how strongly its performance is enforced upon ourselves, by the conduct of one greater than Moses, who expressly "suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his footsteps."

CHAP. XVI.

CHRISTIAN WATCHFULNESS.

Of all the motives to vigilance and self-discipline which Christianity presents, there is not one more powerful than the danger, from which even religious persons are not exempt, of slackening in zeal and declining in piety. Would we could affirm, that coldness in religion is confined to the irreligious! If it be melancholy to observe an absence of Christianity where no great profession of it was ever made, it is far more grievous to mark its declension where it once appeared not only to exist, but to flourish. We feel on the comparison, the same distinct sort of compassion with which we contemplate the pecuniary distresses of those who have been always indigent, and of those who have fallen into want from a state of opulence. Our concern differs not only in degree but in kind.

This declension is one of the most awakening calls to watchfulness, to humility and self-inspection which religion can make to him "who thinketh he standeth"—which it can make to him who, sensible of his own weakness, ought to feel the necessity "of strengthening the things which remain that are ready to die."

If there is not any one circumstance which ought more to alarm and quicken the Christian, than that of finding himself grow languid and indifferent, after having made not only a profession, but a progress, so there is not a more reasonable motive of triumph to the profane, not one cause which excites in him a more plausible ground of suspicion, either that there never was any truth in the profession of the person in question, or which is a more fatal, and, to such a mind, a more natural conclusion, that there is no truth in religion itself. At best, he will be persuaded that this can only be a faint and feeble principle, the impulse of which is so soon exhausted, and which is by no means found sufficiently powerful to carry on its votary throughout his course.—He is assured that piety is only an outer garment, put on for shew or convenience, and that when it ceases to be wanted for either, it is laid aside. In these unhappy instances the evil seldom ceases with him who causes it. The inference be-

comes general, that all religious men are equally unsound or equally deluded, only that some are more prudent, or more fortunate, or greater hypocrites than others. After the falling away of one promising character, the old suspicion recurs and is confirmed, and the defection of others pronounced to be infallible.

There seems to be this marked distinction in the different opinions which religious and worldly men entertain respecting human corruption. The candid Christian is contented to believe it, as an indisputable general truth, while he is backward to suspect the wickedness of the individual, nor does he allow himself to give full credit to particular instances without proof. The man of the world on the contrary, who denies the general principle, is extremely prone to suspect the individual. Thus his knowledge of mankind not only furnishes a proof, but outstrips the truth, of the doctrine; though he denies it as a proposition of scripture, he is eager to establish it as a fact of experiment.

But the probability is, that the man, who by his departure from the principles with which he appeared to set out, so much gratifies the thoughtless, and grieves the serious mind, never was a sound and genuine Christian. His religion was perhaps taken up on some accidental circumstance, built on some false ground, pro-

duced by some evanescent cause ; and though it cannot be fairly pronounced that he intended by his forward profession, and prominent zeal, to deceive others, it is probable that he himself was deceived. Perhaps he had made too sure of himself. His early profession was probably rather bold and ostentatious ; he had imprudently fixed his stand on ground so high as to be not easily tenable, and from which a descent would be but too observable. While he thought he never could be too secure of his own strength, he allowed himself to be too censorious on the infirmities of others, especially of those whom he had apparently outstripped, and who, though they had started together, he had left behind him in the race.

Might it not be a safer course, if in the outset of the christian life, a modest and self-distrusting humility were to impose a temporary restraint on the forwardness of outward profession. A little knowledge of the human heart, a little suspicion of the deceitfulness of his own, would not only moderate the intemperance of an ill-understood zeal, should the warm convert become an established christian, but would save the credit of religion, which will receive a fresh wound, in the possible event of his desertion from her standard,

Some of the most distinguished Christians in this country began their religious career with

this graceful humility. They would not suffer their change of character and their adoption of new principles, and a new course, to be blazoned abroad, as the affectionate zeal of their confidential friends would have advised, till the principles they had adopted were established, and worked into habits of piety ; till time and experience had evinced that the grace of God had not been bestowed on them in vain. Their progress proved to be such as might have been inferred from the modesty of their outset. They have gone on with a perseverance which difficulties have only contributed to strengthen, and experience to confirm ; and will, through divine aid, doubtless, go on, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

But to return to the less steady convert. Perhaps religion was only, as we have hinted elsewhere, one pursuit among many which he had taken up when other pursuits failed, and which he now lays down, because his faith not being rooted and grounded, fails also ;—or the temptations arising from without might concur with the failure within. If vanity be his infirmity, he will shrink from the pointed disapprobation of his superiors. If the love of novelty be his besetting weakness, the very peculiarity and strictness of religion, the very marked departure from the "gay and primrose

path" in which he had before been accustomed to walk, which first attracted, now repel him. The attention which his early deviation from the manners of the world drew upon him, and which once flattered, now disgusts him. The very opposition which once animated, now cools him. He is discouraged at the near view, subdued by the required practice, of that christian self-denial which, as a speculation, had appeared so delightful. Perhaps his fancy had been fired by some acts of Christian heroism, which he felt an ambition to imitate: a feeling which tales of martial prowess, or deeds of chivalry, something that, promising celebrity and exciting emulation, had often kindled before. The truth is, religion had only taken hold of his imagination, his heart had been left out of the question.

Or he had in the twilight of his first awakening, seen religion only as something to be believed—he now finds that much is to be done in the new life, and much which was habitual to the old one, left undone.—Above all he did not reckon on the CONSISTENCY which the christian life demands. Warm affections rendered the practice of some right actions easy to him; but he did not include in his faulty and imperfect scheme, the self-denial, the perseverance, the renouncing of his own

will and his own way, the evil report, as well as the good report, to which every man pledges himself, when he enlists under the banner of Christ. The cross which it was easy to venerate, he finds it hard to bear.

Or religion might be adopted when he was in affliction, and he is now happy;—when he was in bad circumstances, and he is now grown affluent. Or it might be assumed, as something wanting to his recommendation to that party or project by which he wished to make his way; as something that would better enable him to carry certain points which he had in view; something that, with the new acquaintance he wished to cultivate, might obliterate certain defects in his former conduct, and white-wash a somewhat sullied reputation.

Or in his now more independent situation, it may be he is surrounded by temptations, softened by blandishments, allured by pleasures, which he never expected would arise to weaken his resolutions. These new enchantments make it not so easy to be pious, as when he had little to lose and every thing to desire, as when the world wore a frowning, and religion an inviting aspect.—Or he is perhaps, by the vicissitudes of life, transferred from a sober and humble society, where to be religious was honorable, to a more fashionable set of asso-

ciates, where, as the disclosure of his piety would add nothing to his credit, he set out with taking pains to conceal it, till it has fallen into that gradual oblivion, which is the natural consequence of its being kept out of sight.

But we proceed to a far more interesting and important character. The one indeed whom we have been slightly sketching, may by his inconstancy do much harm, the one on which we are about to animadvert, might by his consistency and perseverance effect essential good.—Even the sincere, and to all appearance, the established christian, especially if his situation in life be easy, and his course smooth and prosperous, had need keep a vigilant eye upon his own heart. For such a one it will not be sufficient that he keep his ground if he do not advance in it. Indeed it will be a sure proof that he has gone back, if he has not advanced.

In a world so beset with snares, various are the causes which may possibly occasion in even good men a slow but certain decline in piety. A decline scarcely perceptible at first, but which becomes more visible in its subsequent stages. When therefore we suspect our hearts of any declension in piety, we should not compare ourselves with what we were in the preceding week or month, but with what we were at the

supposed height of our character. Though the alteration was not perceptible in its gradual progress, one shade melting into the next, and each losing its distinctness, yet when the two remote states are brought into contrast, the change will be strikingly obvious.

Among other causes, may be assigned the indiscreet forming of some worldly connection: especially that of marriage. In this connection, for *union* it cannot be called, it is to be lamented that the irreligious more frequently draw away the religious to their side, than that the contrary takes place; a circumstance easily accounted for by those who are at all acquainted with the human heart.

Or the sincere but incautious Christian may be led by a strong affection which assumes the shape of virtue, into a fond desire of establishing his children advantageously in the world, into methods which if not absolutely incorrect, are yet ambiguous at the best. In order to raise those whom he loves to a station above their level, he may be tempted, while self-deceit will teach him to sanctify the deed by the motive, to make some little sacrifices of principle, some little abatements of that strict rectitude, for which, in the abstract, no man would more strenuously contend. And as it may be in general observed, that the most amiable minds are most susceptible of the strongest

natural affections; of course the very tenderness of the heart lays such characters peculiarly open to a danger to which the unfeeling and the obdurate are less exposed.

If the person in question be of the sacred order, no small danger may arise from his living under the eye of an irreligious, but rich and bountiful patron. It is his duty to make religion appear amiable in his eyes. He ought to conciliate his good will by every means which rectitude can sanction. But though his very piety will stimulate his discretion in the adoption of those means, he will take care never to let his discretion intrench on his integrity.

If he be under obligations to him, he may be in danger of testifying his gratitude, and furthering his hopes by some electioneering manœuvres, and by too much electioneering society. He may, unawares, be tempted to too much conformity to his friend's habits, to too much conviviality in his society. And when he witnesses so much kindness and urbanity in his manners, possibly so much usefulness and benevolence in his life, he may be even tempted to suspect that he himself may be wrong; to accuse himself of being somewhat churlish in his own temper, a little too austere in his habits, and rather hard in his

judgment of a man so amiable. He will be still more likely to fall into this error if he expects a favour than if he has obtained it; for though it is not greatly to the honour of human nature, we daily see how much keener are the feelings which are excited by hope than those which are raised by gratitude. The favour which has been already conferred excites a temperate, that which we are looking for, a fervid feeling.

These relaxing feelings and these softened dispositions, aided by the seducing luxury of the table, and the bewitching splendor of the apartment, by the soft accommodations which opulence exhibits, and the desires which they are too apt to awaken in the dependent, may, not impossibly, lead by degrees to a criminal timidity in maintaining the purity of his own principles, in supporting the strictness of his own practice. He may gradually lose somewhat of the dignity of his professional, and of the sobriety of his christian character. He may be brought to forfeit the independence of his mind; and in order to magnify his fortune, may neglect to magnify his office.

Even here, from an increasing remissness in self-examination, he may deceive himself by persisting to believe—for the films are now grown thicker over his spiritual sight—that

his motives are defensible. Were not his discernment labouring under a temporary blindness, he would reprobate the character which interested views have insensibly drawn him in to act. He would be as much astonished to be told that this character was become his own, as was the Royal Offender, when the righteous boldness of the Prophet pronounced the heart-appalling words, "Thou art the man."

Still he continues to flatter himself that the reason of his diminished opposition to the faults of his friend, is not because he has a more lucrative situation in view, but because he may by a slight temporary concession, and a short suspension of a severity which he begins to fancy he has carried too far, secure for his future life a more extensive field of usefulness, in the benefice which is hanging over his head.

In the mean time, hope and expectation so fill his mind that he insensibly grows cold in the prosecution of his positive duties. He begins to lament that in his present situation he can make but few converts, that he sees but small effects of his labours; not perceiving that God may have withdrawn his blessing from a ministry which is exercised on such questionable grounds. With his new expectations he continues to blend his old ideas. He feasts

his imagination with the prospect of a more fruitful harvest on an unknown, and perhaps an unbroken soil—as if human nature were not pretty much the same every where; as if the labourer were accountable for the abundance of his crop, and not solely for his own assiduity—as if actual duty faithfully performed, even in that circumscribed sphere in which God has cast our lot, is not more acceptable to him, than theories of the most extensive good, than distant speculations and improbable projects, for the benefit even of a whole district; while, in the indulgence of those airy schemes, our own specific and appointed work lies neglected, or is performed without energy and without attention.

Self-love so naturally infatuates the judgment, that it is no paradox to assert that we look too far, and yet do not look far enough. We look too far when passing over the actual duties of the immediate scene, we form long connected trains of future projects, and indulge our thoughts in such as are most remote, and perhaps least probable. And we do not look far enough when the prospective mind does not shoot beyond all these little earthly distances, to that state, falsely called remote, whither all our steps are not the less tending, because our eyes are confined to the home

scenes. But while the precariousness of our duration ought to set limits to our designs, it should furnish incitements to our application. Distant projects are too apt to slacken present industry, while the magnitude of schemes, probably impracticable, may render our actual exertions cold and sluggish.

Let it be observed that we would be the last to censure any of those fair and honorable means of improving his condition, which every man, be he worldly or religious, owes to himself, and to his family. Saints as well as sinners have in common, what a great genius calls, "certain inconvenient appetites of eating and drinking," which while we are in the body must be complied with. It would be a great hardship on good men, to be denied any innocent means of fair gratification. It would be a peculiar injustice that the most diligent labourer should be esteemed the least worthy of his hire, the least fit to rise in his profession.

The more serious Clergyman has also the same warm affection for his children with his less scrupulous brother, and consequently the same laudable desire for their comfortable establishment; only in his plans for their advancement he should neither entertain ambitious views, nor prosecute any views, even the best, by methods not consonant to the strictness of his avowed principles. Professing to

"seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness," he ought to be more exempt from an over-anxious solicitude than those who profess it less zealously. Avowing a more determined confidence that all other things will, as far as they are absolutely necessary, "be added unto him," he should, as it is obvious he commonly does, manifest practically, a more implicit trust, confiding in that gracious and cheering promise, that promise expressed both negatively and positively, as if to comfort by a double confirmation, that God who is "both his light and defence, who will give grace and worship, will also withhold no good thing from them that live a godly life."

It is one of the trials of faith appended to the sacred office, that its ministers, like the father of the faithful, are liable to go out, "not knowing whither they go;" and this not only at their first entrance into their profession but throughout life; an inconvenience to which no other profession is necessarily liable; a trial which is not perhaps fairly estimated.

This remark will naturally raise a laugh among those who at once hold the function in contempt, deride its ministers, and think their well-earned remuneration lavishly and even unnecessarily bestowed. They will probably exclaim with as much complacency in their

ridicule, as if it were really the test of truth—"A great cause of comiseration truly, to be transferred from a starving curacy to a plentiful benefice, or from the vulgar society of a country Parish, to be a stalled Theologian in an opulent Town!"—

We are far from estimating at a low rate the exchange from a state of uncertainty to a state of independence, from a life of penury to comfort, or from a barely decent to an affluent provision.—But does the ironical remarker rate the feelings and affections of the heart at nothing? If he insists that money is that *chief* good of which ancient philosophy says so much, we beg leave to insist that it is not the *only* good. We are above the affectation of pretending to condole with any man on his exaltation, but there are feelings which a man of acute sensibility, rendered more acute by an elegant education, values more intimately than silver or gold.

Is it absolutely nothing to resign his local comforts, to break up his local attachments, to have new connections to form, and that frequently at an advanced period of life? Connections, perhaps less valuable than those he is quitting? Is it nothing for a faithful Minister to be separated from an affectionate people, a people not only whose friendship but whose progress has constituted his happiness here, as

it will make his joy and crown of rejoicing hereafter?

Men of delicate minds estimate things by their affections as well as by their circumstances; to a man of a certain cast of character, a change however advantageous, may be rather an exile than a promotion. While he gratefully accepts the good, he receives it with an edifying acknowledgment of the imperfection of the best human things. These considerations we confess add the additional feelings of kindness to their persons, and of sympathy with their vicissitudes, to our respect and veneration for their holy office.

To themselves, however, the precarious tenure of their situation presents an instructive emblem of the uncertain condition of human life, of the transitory nature of the world itself. Their liableness to a sudden removal gives them the advantage of being more especially reminded of the necessity and duty of keeping in a continual posture of preparation, having "their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand." They have also the same promises which supported the Israelites in the desart.—The same assurance which cheered Abraham, may still cheer the true servants of God under all difficulties.—"Fear not—I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward."

But there are perils on the right hand and on the left. It is not among the least, that though a pious Clergyman may at first have tasted with trembling caution of the delicious cup of applause, he may gradually grow, as thirst is increased by indulgence, to drink too deeply of the enchanted chalice. The dangers arising from any thing that is good, are formidable, because unsuspected. And such are the perils of popularity that we will venture to say that the victorious General, who has conquered a kingdom, or the sagacious Statesman who has preserved it, is almost in less danger of being spoilt by acclamation than the popular Preacher; because *their* danger is likely to happen but once, his is perpetual. Theirs is only on a day of triumph, his day of triumph occurs every week; we mean the admiration he excites. Every fresh success ought to be a fresh motive to humiliation; he who feels his danger will vigilantly guard against swallowing too greedily the indiscriminate, and often undistinguishing plaudits which his doctrines or his manner, his talents or his voice, may equally procure for him.

If he be not prudent as well as pious, he may be brought to humour his audience, and his audience to flatter him with a dangerous emulation, till they will scarcely endure truth

itself from any other lips. Nay, he may imperceptibly be led not to be always satisfied with the attention and improvement of his hearers, unless the attention be sweetened by flattery, and the improvement followed by exclusive attachment.

The spirit of exclusive fondness generates a spirit of controversy. Some of the followers will rather improve in casuistry than in Christianity. They will be more busied in opposing Paul to Apollos, than looking unto "Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith;" than in bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. Religious gossip may assume the place of religion itself. A party spirit is thus generated, and Christianity may begin to be considered as a thing to be discussed and disputed, to be heard and talked about, rather than as the productive principle of virtuous conduct*.

We owe, indeed, lively gratitude and affectionate attachment to the Minister who has faithfully laboured for our edification; but the Author has sometimes noticed a manner adopted by some injudicious adherents, especially of her own sex, which seems rather to erect their favourite into the head of a sect, than to reverence him as the pastor of a flock. This

* This polemic tattle is of a totally different character from that species of religious conversation recommended in the preceding Chapter.

mode of evincing an attachment, amiable in itself, is doubtless as distressing to the delicacy of the Minister as it is unfavourable to religion, to which it is apt to give an air of party.

May we be allowed to animadvert more immediately on the cause of declension in piety in some persons who formerly exhibited evident marks of that seriousness in their lives which they continue to inculcate from the Pulpit. If such has been sometimes (we hope it has been very rarely) the case, may it not be partly ascribed to an unhappy notion that the same exactness in his private devotion, the same watchfulness in his daily conduct, is not equally necessary in the advanced progress as in the first stages of a religious course? He does not desist from warning his hearers of the continual necessity of these things, but is he not in some danger of not applying the necessity to himself? May he not begin to rest satisfied with the inculcation without the practice? It is not probable indeed that he goes so far as to establish himself as an exempt case, but he slides from indolence into the exemption, as if its avoidance were not so necessary for him as for others.

Even the very sacredness of his profession is not without a snare. He may repeat the holy offices so often that he may be in danger on

the one hand, of sinking into the notion that it is a mere profession, or on the other, of so resting in it as to make it supercede the necessity of that strict personal religion with which he set out: He may at least be satisfied with the occasional, without the uniform practice. There is a danger—we advert only to its possibility—that his very exactness in the public exercise of his function may lead to a little justification of his remissness in secret duties. His zealous exposition of the scriptures to others may satisfy him, though it does not always lead to a practical application of them to himself.

But God, by requiring exemplary diligence in the devotion of his appointed servants, would keep up in their minds a daily sense of their dependence on him. If he does not continually teach by his spirit those who teach others, they have little reason to expect success, and that spirit will not be given where it is not sought, or, which is an awful consideration, may be withdrawn, where it had been given and not improved as it might have been.

Should this unhappily ever be the case, it would almost reduce the minister of Christ to a mere engine, a vehicle through which knowledge was barely to pass, like the ancient ora-

cles who had nothing to do with the information but to convey it. Perhaps the public success of the best men has been, under God, principally owing to this, that their faithful ministration in the Temple has been uniformly preceded and followed by petitions in the closet; that the truths implanted in the one have chiefly flourished from having been watered by the tears and nourished by the prayers of the other.

We will hazard but one more observation on this dangerous and delicate subject; in this superficial treatment of which it is the thing in the world the most remote from the writer's wish to give the slightest offence to any pious member of an order which possesses her highest veneration.—If the indefatigable labourer in his great master's vineyard, has, as must often be the case, the mortification of finding that his labours have failed of producing their desired effect, in some instance, where his warmest hopes had been excited;—if he feels that he has not benefited others as he had earnestly desired, this is precisely the moment to benefit himself, and is perhaps permitted for that very end. Where his usefulness has been obviously great, the true Christian will be humbled by the recollection that he is only

an instrument. Where it has been less, the defeat of his hopes offers the best occasion, which he will not fail to use, for improving his humility. Thus he may always be assured that good has been done somewhere, so that in any case his labour will not have been vain in the Lord.

CHAP. XVII.

TRUE AND FALSE ZEAL.

It is one of the most important ends of cultivating that self-knowledge which we have elsewhere recommended, to discover what is the real bent of our mind, and which are the strongest tendencies of our character; to discover where our disposition requires restraint, and where we may be safely trusted with some liberty of indulgence. If the temper be fervid, and that fervour be happily directed to religion, the most consummate prudence will be requisite to restrain its excesses without freezing its energies.

If, on the contrary, timidity and diffidence be the natural propensity, we shall be in danger of falling into coldness and inactivity with regard to ourselves, and into too unresisting a compliance with the requisitions, or too easy a conformity with the habits of others. It will therefore be an evident proof of christian self-

government, when the man of too ardent zeal restrains its outward expression where it would be unseasonable or unsafe; while it will evince the same christian self-denial in the fearful and diffident character, to burst the fetters of timidity, where duty requires a holy boldness; and when he is called upon to lose all lesser fears in the fear of God.

It will then be one of the first objects of a Christian to get his understanding and his conscience thoroughly enlightened; to take an exact survey not only of the whole comprehensive scheme of christianity, but of his own character; to discover, in order to correct, the defects in his judgment, and to ascertain the deficiencies even of his best qualities. Through ignorance in these respects, though he may really be following up some good tendency, though he is even persuaded that he is not wrong either in his motive or his object, he may yet be wrong in the measure, wrong in the mode, wrong in the application, though right in the principle. He must therefore watch with a suspicious eye over his better qualities, and guard his very virtues from deviation and excess.

His zeal, that indispensable ingredient in the composition of a great character, that quality, without which no great eminence either

secular or religious has ever been attained; which is essential to the acquisition of excellence in arts and arms, in learning and piety; that principle without which no man will be able to reach the perfection of his nature, or to animate others to aim at that perfection, will yet hardly fail to mislead the animated christian, if his knowledge of what is right and just, if his judgment in the application of that knowledge do not keep pace with the principle itself.

Zeal, indeed, is not so much an individual virtue, as the principle which gives life and colouring, as the spirit which gives grace and benignity, as the temper which gives warmth and energy to every other. It is that feeling which exalts the relish of every duty, and sheds a lustre on the practice of every virtue; which, embellishing every image of the mind with its glowing tints, animates every quality of the heart with its invigorating motion. It may be said of zeal among the virtues as of memory among the faculties, that though it singly never made a great man, yet no man has ever made himself conspicuously great where it has been wanting.

Many things however must concur before we can be allowed to determine whether zeal be really a virtue or a vice. Those who are

contending for the one or the other, will be in the situation of the two knights, who meeting on a cross road, were on the point of fighting about the colour of a cross which was suspended between them. One insisted it was gold; the other maintained it was silver. The duel was prevented by the interference of a passenger, who desired them to change their positions. Both crossed over to the opposite side, found the cross was gold on one side, and silver on the other. Each acknowledged his opponent to be right.

It may be disputed whether fire be a good or an evil. The man who feels himself cheered by its kindly warmth, is assured that it is a benefit, but he whose house it has just burnt down will give another verdict. Not only the cause, therefore, in which zeal is exerted must be good, but the principle itself must be under due regulation: or, like the rapidity of the traveller who gets into a wrong road, it will only carry him so much the further out of his way; or if he be in the right road, it will, through inattention, carry him involuntarily beyond his destined point. That degree of motion is equally misleading, which detains us short of our end, or which pushes us beyond it.

The Apostle suggests a useful precaution by expressly asserting that it is "in a good

cause," that we "must be zealously affected," which implies this further truth, that where the cause is not good, the mischief is proportioned to the zeal. But lest we should carry our limitations of the quality to any restriction of the seasons for exercising it, he takes care to animate us to its perpetual exercise, by adding that we must be *always* so affected.

If the injustice, the intolerance and persecution, with which a misguided zeal has so often afflicted the Church of Christ, in its more early periods, be lamented as a deplorable evil, yet the over-ruling wisdom of Providence educing good from evil, made the very calamities which false zeal occasioned, the instruments of producing that true and lively zeal to which we owe the glorious band of Martyrs and Confessors, those brightest ornaments of the best periods of the Church. This effect, though a clear vindication of that divine goodness which suffers evil, is no apology for him who perpetrates it.

It is curious to observe the contrary operations of true and false zeal, which though apparently only different modifications of the same quality, are, when brought into contact, repugnant, and even destructive to each other. There is no attribute of the human mind where the different effects of the same principle have

such a total opposition: for is it not obvious that the same principle under another direction, which actuates the tyrant in dragging the Martyr to the stake, enables the Martyr to embrace it?

As a striking proof that the necessity for caution is not imaginary, it has been observed that the Holy Scriptures record more instances of a bad zeal than of a good one. This furnishes the most authoritative argument for regulating this impetuous principle, and for governing it by all those restrictions which a feeling so calculated for good and so capable of evil demands.

It was zeal, but of a blind and furious character, which produced the Massacre on the day of St. Bartholomew—a day to which the mournful strains of Job have been so well applied.—"Let that day perish. Let it not be joined to the days of the year. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it."—It was a zeal the most bloody, combined with a perfidy the most detestable, which inflamed the execrable Florentine*, when, having on this occasion invited so many illustrious protestants to Paris under the alluring mask of a public festivity, she contrived to involve her guest, the pious queen of Navarre, and the venerable

* Catherine de Medici.

Coligni in the general mass of undistinguished destruction. The royal and pontifical assassins, not satisfied with the sin, converted it into a triumph. Medals were struck in honour of a deed which has no parallel even in the Annals of Pagan persecution.

Even glory did not content the pernicious plotters of this direful Tragedy. Devotion was called in to be

The crown and consummation of their crime.

The blackest hypocrisy was made use of to sanctify the foulest murder. The iniquity could not be complete without solemnly thanking God for its success. The Pope and Cardinals proceeded to St. Mark's Church where they praised the Almighty for so great a blessing conferred on the See of Rome, and the Christian world. A solemn Jubilee completed the preposterous mummery.—This zeal of devotion was as much worse than even the zeal of murder, as thanking God for enabling us to commit a sin is worse than the commission itself. A wicked piety is still more disgusting than a wicked act. God is less offended by the sin itself than by the thank-offering of its perpetrators. It looks like a black attempt to involve the Creator in the crime.*

* See Thuanus for a most affecting and exact account of this direful massacre.

It was this exterminating zeal which made the fourteenth Louis, bad in the profligacy of his youth, worse in the superstition of his age, revoke the tolerating Edict which might have drawn down a blessing on his kingdom.—One species of crime was called on, in his days of blind devotion, to expiate another committed in his days of mad ambition. But the expiation was even more intolerable than the offence. The havoc made by the sword of civil persecution was a miserable atonement for the blood which unjust aggression had shed in foreign wars.

It was this impious and cruel zeal which inspired the Monk Dominic in erecting the most infernal Tribunal which ever inventive bigotry projected to dishonour the Christian name, and with which pertinacious barbarity has continued for above Six Centuries, to afflict the human race.

For a complete contrast to this pernicious zeal we need not, blessed be God, travel back into remote history, nor abroad into distant realms. This happy land of civil and religious liberty can furnish a countless catalogue of instances of a pure, a wise, and a well directed zeal. Not to swell the list, we will only mention that it has in our own Age, produced the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge,

the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the Abolition of the African Slave Trade.—Three as noble, and which will, we trust, be as lasting monuments as ever national Virtue erected to true piety. These are Institutions which bear the genuine stamp of Christianity, not originating in party, founded in disinterestedness, and comprehending the best interests of almost the whole habitable globe—"without partiality and without hypocrisy."

Why we hear so much in praise of zeal from a certain class of religious characters, is partly owing to their having taken up a notion that its required exertions relate to the care of other people's salvation rather than to their own; and indeed the casual prying into a neighbour's house, though much more entertaining, is not near so troublesome as the constant inspection of one's own. It is observable that the outcry against zeal among the irreligious is raised on nearly the same ground, as the clamour in its favour by these professors of religion. The former suspect that the zeal of the religionist evaporates in censuring *their* impiety, and in eagerness for *their* conversion, instead of being directed to themselves. This supposed anxiety they resent, and give a practical proof of their resentment by resolving not to profit by it.

Two very erroneous opinions exist, respecting zeal. It is commonly supposed to indicate a want of charity, and the two principles are accused of maintaining separate interests. This is so far from being the case, that charity is the firm associate of that zeal of which it is suspected to be the enemy. Indeed, this is so infallible a criterion by which to try its sincerity, that we should be apt to suspect the legitimacy of the zeal which is unaccompanied by this fair ally.

Another opinion equally erroneous is not a little prevalent—that where there is much zeal there is little or no prudence. Now a sound and sober zeal is not such an ideot as to neglect to provide for its own success; and would that success be provided for, without employing for its accomplishment, every precaution which prudence can suggest? True zeal therefore will be as discreet as it is fervent, well knowing that its warmest efforts will be neither effectual, nor lasting, without those provisions which discretion alone can make. No quality is ever possessed in perfection where its opposite is wanting; zeal is not Christian fervor, but animal heat, if not associated with charity and prudence.

Zeal indeed, like other good things, is frequently calumniated because it is not understood; and it may sometimes deserve censure,

as being the effervescence of that weak but well meaning mind which will defeat the efforts not only of this, but of every other good propensity.

That most valuable faculty therefore of intellectual man, the judgment, the enlightened, impartial, unbiassed judgment, must be kept in perpetual activity, not only in order to ascertain that the cause be good, but to determine also the degree of its importance in any given case, that we may not blindly assign an undue value to an inferior good: for want of this discrimination we may be fighting a windmill, when we fancy we are attacking a fort. We must prove not only whether the thing contended for be right, but whether it be essential; whether in our eagerness to attain this subordinate good we may not be sacrificing, or neglecting, things of more real consequence. Whether the value we assign to it may not be even imaginary.

Above all, we should examine whether we do not contend for it chiefly because it happens to fall in with our own humour, or our own party, more than on account of its intrinsic worth; whether we do not wish to distinguish ourselves by our pertinacity, and to append ourselves to the party rather than to the principle; and thus, as popularity is often gained by the worst part of a man's character, whether we do

not principally persist from the hope of becoming popular. The favourite adage that *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle* might serve as an appropriate motto to one half of the contentions which divide and distract the world.

This zeal, hotly exercised for mere circumstantials, for ceremonies different in themselves, for distinctions rather than differences, has unhappily assisted in causing irreparable separations and dissentions in the Christian world, even where the champions on both sides were great and good men. Many of the points which have been the sources of altercation were not worth insisting upon, where the opponents agreed in the grand fundamentals of faith and practice.

But to consider zeal as a general question, as a thing of every day experience.—He whose piety is most sincere will be likely to be the most zealous. But though zeal is an indication, and even a concomitant of sincerity, a burning zeal is sometimes seen where the sincerity is somewhat questionable.

For where zeal is generated by ignorance it is commonly fostered by self-will. That which we have embraced through false judgment we maintain through false honour. Pride is generally called in to nurse the offspring of error. It is from this confederacy that we frequently see

those who are perversely zealous for points which can add nothing to the cause of Christian truth, whether they are rejected or retained, cold and indifferent about the great things which involve the salvation of man.

Though all momentous truths, all indispensable duties, are, in the luminous volume of inspiration, made so obvious that those may read who run, the contested matters are not only so comparatively little as to be by no means worthy of the heat they excite, but are rendered so doubtful, not in themselves, but by the opposite systems built on them, that he who fights for them is not always sure whether he be right or not; and if he carry his point he can make no moral use of his victory. This indeed is not his concern. It is enough that he has conquered. The importance of the object having never depended on its worth, but on the opinion of his right to maintain that worth.

The Gospel assigns very different degrees of importance to allowed practices and commanded duties. It by no means censures those who were rigorous in their payment of the most inconsiderable tythes; but seeing this duty was not only put in competition with, but preferred before, the most important duties, even judgment, mercy, and faith, the flagrant hypocrisy was pointedly censured by MEEKNESS itself.

This opposition of a scrupulous exactness in paying the petty demand on three paltry herbs, to the neglect of the three cardinal christian virtues, exhibits as complete and instructive a specimen of that frivolous and false zeal which, evaporating in trifles, wholly overlooks those grand points on which hangs eternal life, as can be conceived.

This passage serves to corroborate a striking fact, that there is scarcely in Scripture any precept enforced which has not some actual exemplification attached to it. The historical parts of the Bible, therefore, are of inestimable value, were it only on this single ground, that the appended truths and principles so abundantly scattered through them, are in general so happily illustrated by them. They are not dry aphorisms and cold propositions, which stand singly, and disconnected, but truths suggested by the event, but precepts growing out of the occasion. The recollection of the principles recals to the mind the instructive story which they enrich, while the remembrance of the circumstance impresses the sentiment upon the heart. Thus the doctrine, like a precious gem, is at once preserved and embellished by the narrative being made a frame in which to enshrine it.

True zeal will first exercise itself in earnest desires, in increasing ardor to obtain higher de-

grees of illumination in our own minds; in fervent prayer that this growing light may operate to the improvement of our practice, that the influences of divine grace may become more outwardly perceptible by the increasing correctness of our habits; that every holy affection may be followed by its correspondent act, whether of obedience or of resignation, of doing, or of suffering.

But the effects of a genuine and enlightened zeal will not stop here. It will be visible in our discourse with those to whom we may have a probability of being useful. But though we should not confine the exercise of our zeal to our conversation, nor our attention to the opinions and practices of others, yet this, when not done with a bustling kind of interference, and offensive forwardness, is proper and useful. It is indeed a natural effect of zeal to appear where it exists, as a fire which really burns will not be prevented from emitting both light and heat, yet we should labour principally to keep up in our own minds the pious feelings which religion has excited there. The brightest flame will decay if no means are used to keep it alive. Pure zeal will cherish every holy affection, and by encreasing every pious disposition will animate us to every duty. It will add new force to our

hatred of sin, fresh contrition to our repentance, additional vigour to our resolutions, and will impart augmented energy to every virtue. It will give life to our devotions, and spirit to all our actions.

When a true zeal has fixed these right affections in our own hearts, the same principle will, as we have already observed, make us earnest to excite them in others. No good man wishes to go to heaven alone, and none ever wished others to go thither without earnestly endeavouring to awaken right affections in them. That will be a false zeal which does not begin with the regulation of our own hearts. That will be an illiberal zeal which stops where it begins. A true zeal will extend itself through the whole sphere of its possessor's influence. Christian zeal like Christian charity will begin at home, but neither the one nor the other must end there.

But that we must not confine our zeal to mere conversation is not only implied but expressed in Scripture. The Apostle does not exhort us to be zealous only of good *words* but of good *works*. True zeal ever produces true benevolence. It would extend the blessings which we ourselves enjoy, to the whole human race. It will consequently stir us up to exert all our influence to the extension of religion, to the ad-

vancement of every well concerted and well conducted plan, calculated to enlarge the limits of human happiness, and more especially to promote the eternal interests of human kind.

But if we do not first strenuously labour for our own illumination, how shall we presume to enlighten others? It is a dangerous presumption, to busy ourselves in improving others, before we have diligently sought our own improvement. Yet it is a vanity not uncommon that the first feelings, be they true or false, which resemble devotion, the first faint ray of knowledge which has imperfectly dawned, excites in certain raw minds an eager impatience to communicate to others what they themselves have not yet attained. Hence the novel swarms of uninstructed instructors, of teachers who have had no time to learn. The act previous to the imparting knowledge should seem to be that of acquiring it. Nothing would so effectually check an irregular, and improve a temperate zeal, as the personal discipline, the self-acquaintance which we have so repeatedly recommended.

True Christian zeal will always be known by its distinguishing and inseparable properties. It will be warm indeed, not from temperament but principle.—It will be humble, or it will not be *Christian* zeal.—It will restrain its impetuosity

that it may the more effectually promote its object.—It will be temperate, softening what is strong in the act by gentleness in the manner. —It will be tolerating, willing to grant what it would itself desire.—It will be forbearing, in the hope that the offence it censures may be an occasional failing, and not a habit of the mind.—It will be candid, making a tender allowance for those imperfections which beings, fallible themselves, ought to expect from human infirmity.—It will be reasonable—employing fair argument and affectionate remonstrance, instead of irritating by the adoption of violence, instead of mortifying by the assumption of superiority.

He, who in private society allows himself in violent anger or unhallowed bitterness, or acrimonious railing, in reprehending the faults of another, might, did his power keep pace with his inclination, have recourse to other weapons. He would probably banish and burn, confiscate and imprison, and think then as he thinks now, that he is doing God service.

If there be any quality which demands a clearer sight, a tighter rein, a stricter watchfulness than another, zeal is that quality. The heart where it is wanting has no elevation; where it is not guarded, no security. The prudence with which it is exercised is the surest evidence

of its integrity; for if intemperate, it not only raises enemies to ourselves but to [illegible] It augments the natural enmity to religion instead of increasing her friends.

But if tempered by charity, if blended with benevolence, if sweetened by kindness, if evinced to be honest by its influence on your own conduct, and gentle by its effect on your manners, it may lead your irreligious acquaintance to enquire more closely in what consists the distinction between them and you. You will already by this mildness have won their affections. Your next step may be to gain over their judgment. They may be led to examine what solid grounds of difference subsist between you and them. What substantial reason you have for not going their lengths. What sound argument they can offer for not going yours.

But it may possibly be asked, after all, where do we perceive any symptoms of this inflammatory distemper? Should not the prevalence, or at least the existence of a disease be ascertained previous to the application of the remedy? That it exists is sufficiently obvious, though it must be confessed that among the higher ranks it has not hitherto spread very widely; nor is its progress likely to be very alarming, or its effects very malignant. It is to be lamented that in ev-

ery rank indeed, coldness and indifference, carelessness and neglect, are the reigning epidemics. These are diseases far more difficult of cure, diseases not more dangerous to the patient than distressing to the physician, who generally finds it more difficult to raise a sluggish habit than to lower an occasional heat. The imprudently zealous man, if he be sincere, may, by a discreet regimen, be brought to a state of complete sanity; but to rouse from a state of morbid indifference; to brace from a total relaxation of the system, must be the immediate work of the great physician of souls; of him who can effect even this, by his spirit accompanying this powerful word, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

CHAP. XVIII.

INSENSIBILITY TO ETERNAL THINGS.

INSENSIBILITY to eternal things, in beings who are standing on the brink of eternity, is a madness which would be reckoned among prodigies, if it were not so common. It would be altogether incredible, if the numberless instances we have of it, were only related, and not witnessed, were only heard of, and not experienced.

If we had a certain prospect of a great estate, and a splendid mansion which we knew must be ours in a few days; and not only our's as a bequest, but an inheritance; not only as a possession, but a perpetuity; if, in the mean time, we rented, on a precarious lease, a paltry cottage in bad repair, ready to fall, and from which we knew we must at all events soon be turned out, depending on the proprietor's will, whether the ejectment might not be the next minute; would

it argue wisdom or even common sense, totally to overlook our near and noble reversion, and to be so fondly attached to our falling tenement, as to spend great part of our time and thoughts in supporting its ruins by props, and concealing its decays by decorations? To be so absorbed in the little sordid pleasures of this frail abode, as not even to cultivate a taste for the delights of the mansion, where such treasures are laid up for us, and on the possession of which we fully reckon in spite of our neglect; this is an excess of inconsideration, which must be seen to be credited.

It is a striking fact, that the acknowledged uncertainty of life drives worldly men to make sure of every thing depending on it except their eternal concerns. It leads them to be regular in their accounts, and exact in their bargains. They are afraid of risking ever so little property, on so precarious a tenure as life, without insuring a reversion. There are even some who speculate on the uncertainty of life as a trade. Strange, that this accurate calculation of the duration of life should not involve a serious attention to its end! Strange, that the critical annuitant should totally overlook his perpetuity! Strange, that in the prudent care not to risk a fraction of property, equal care should not be taken, not to risk eternal salvation!

We are not supposing flagitious characters, remarkable for any thing which the world calls wicked; we are not supposing their wealth obtained by injustice, or increased by oppression. We are only supposing a soul drawn aside from God, by the alluring baits of a world, which, like the treacherous lover of Atalanta, causes him to lose the victory by throwing golden apples in his way. The shining baits are obtained, but the race is lost!

To worldly men of a graver cast, business may be as formidable an enemy as pleasure is to those of a lighter turn: Business has so sober an air that it looks like virtue, and virtuous it certainly is, when carried on in a proper spirit, with due moderation, and in the fear of God. To have a lawful employment, and to pursue it with diligence, is not only right and honourable in itself, but is one of the best preservatives from temptation*.

When a man pleads in his favour, the diligence business demands, the self-denying practices it imposes, the patience, the regularity, the industry indispensable to its success, when he argues that these are habits of virtue, that they

* That accurate judge of human life, Dr. Johnson, has often been heard by the writer of these pages to observe, that it was the greatest misfortuue which could befal a man to have been bred to no profession, and pathetically to regret that this misfortune was his own.

are a daily discipline to the moral man, and that the world could not subsist without business, he argues justly :—but when he forgets his interests in the eternal world, when he neglects to lay up a treasure in heaven, in order that he may augment a store which he does not want, and, perhaps, does not intend to use, or uses to purposes merely secular, he is a bad calculator of the relative value of things.

Business has an honourable aspect as being opposed to idleness, the most hopeless offspring of the whole progeny of sin. The man of business comparing himself with the man of dissipation, feels a fair and natural consciousness of his own value, and of the superiority of his own pursuits. But it is by comparison that we deceive ourselves to our ruin. Business, whether professional, commercial, or political, endangers minds of a better cast, minds which look down on pleasure as beneath a thinking being. But if business absorb the affections, if it swallow up time, to the neglect of eternity ; if it generate a worldly spirit ; if it cherish covetousness ; if it engage the mind in long views, and ambitious pursuits, it may be as dangerous, as its more inconsiderate and frivolous rival. The grand evil of both lies in the alienation of the heart from God. Nay, in one respect, the danger is greater to him who is the best employed. The man of

pleasure, however thoughtless, can never make himself believe that he is doing right. The man plunged in the serious bustle of business, cannot easily persuade himself that he may be doing wrong.

Commutation, compensation, and substitution, are the grand engines which WORLDLY RELIGION incessantly keeps in play. Her's is a life of barter, a state of spiritual traffic, so much indulgence for so many good works. The implication is, "we have a rigorous master," and it is but fair to indemnify ourselves for the severity of his requisitions; just as an overworked servant steals a holiday. "These persons," says an eminent writer*, "maintan a *meum* and *tuum* with heaven itself." They set bounds to God's prerogative, lest it should too much encroach on man's privilege.

We have elsewhere observed, that if we invite people to embrace religion on the mere mercenary ground of present pleasure, they will desert it as soon as they find themselves disappointed. Men are too ready to clamour for the pleasures of piety, before they have, I dare not say, entitled themselves to them, but put themselves into the way of receiving them. We should be angry at that servant, who made the receiving of his

* The learned and pious John Smith.

wages a preliminary to the performance of his work. This is not meant to establish the merit of works, but the necessity of our seeking that transforming and purifying change which characterizes the real Christian; instead of complaining that we do not possess those consolations, which can be consequent only on such a mutation of the mind.

But if men consider this world on the true scripture ground, as a state of probation; if they consider religion as a school for happiness indeed, but of which the consummation is only to be enjoyed in heaven, the Christian hope will support them; the Christian faith will strengthen them. They will serve diligently, wait patiently, love cordially, obey faithfully, and be stedfast under all trials, sustained by the cheering promise held out to him "who endures to the end."

There are certain characters who seem to have a graduated scale of vices. Of this scale they keep clear of the lowest degrees, and to rise above the highest they are not ambitious, forgetful that the same principle which operates in the greater, operates also in the less. A life of incessant gratification does not alarm the conscience, yet it is equally unfavourable to religion, equally destructive of its principle, equally opposite to its spirit, with more obvious vices.

These are the habits which, by relaxing the mind and dissolving the heart, particularly foster indifference to our spiritual state and insensibility to the things of eternity. A life of voluptuousness, if it be not a life of actual sin, is a disqualification for holiness, for happiness, for heaven. It not only alienates the heart from God, but lays it open to every temptation to which natural temper may invite, or incidental circumstances allure. The worst passions lie dormant in hearts given up to selfish indulgences, always ready to start into action as occasion calls.

Voluptuousness and irreligion play into each other's hands: they are reciprocally cause and effect. The looseness of the principle confirms the carelessness of the conduct, while the negligent conduct in its own vindication shelters itself under the supposed security of unbelief. The instance of the Rich Man in the Parable of Lazarus, strikingly illustrates this truth.

Whoever doubts that a life of sensuality is consistent with the most unfeeling barbarity to the wants and sufferings of others; whoever doubts that boundless expence and magnificence, the means of procuring which were wrung from the robbery and murder of a lacerated world, may not be associated with that robbery and murder,—let him turn to the gorgeous festivities and unparalleled pageantries of Versailles and

Saint Cloud.—There the imperial Harlequin, from acting the deepest and the longest Tragedy that ever drew tears of blood from an audience composed of the whole civilized Globe, by a sudden stroke of his magic wand, shifts the scene to the most preposterous Pantomime :—

> Where moody madness laughing wild
> Amidst severest woe,

gloomily contemplates the incongruous spectacle, sees the records of the Tyburn Chronicle embellished with the wanton splendours of the Arabian tales ; beholds

> Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things ;

beholds Tyranny with his painted vizor of patriotism, and Polygamy with her Janus face of political conscience and counterfeit affection fill the fore ground ; while sceptered parasites, and pinchbeck potentates, tricked out with the shining spoils of plundered empires, and decked with the pilfered crowns of deposed and exiled Monarchs, fill and empty the changing scene, with " exits and with entrances," as fleeting and unsubstantial as the progeny of Banquo ;—beholds inventive but fruitless art, solicitously decorate the ample stage to conceal the stains of blood—stains as indelible as those which the ambitious wife of the irresolute Thane vainly

strove to wash from her polluted hands, while in her sleeping delirium she continued to cry,

> Still here's the smell of blood;
> The perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten it.

But to return to the general question. Let us not enquire whether these unfeeling tempers and selfish habits offend society, and discredit us with the world; but whether they feed our corruptions and put us in a posture unfavourable to all interior improvement; whether they offend God and endanger the soul; whether the gratification of self is the life which the Redeemer taught or lived; whether sensuality is a suitable preparation for that state where God himself, who is a spirit, will constitute all the happiness of spiritual beings.

But these are not the only, perhaps not the greatest dangers. The intellectual vices, the spiritual offences, may destroy the soul without much injuring the credit. These have not, like voluptuousness, their seasons of alternation and repose. Here the principle is in continual operation. Envy has no interval. Ambition never cools. Pride never sleeps. The principle at least is always awake. An intemperate man is sometimes sober, but a proud man is never humble. Where vanity reigns, she reigns always. These interior sins are more difficult of

extirpation, they are less easy of detection, more hard to come at; and, as the citadel sometimes holds out after the outworks are taken, these sins of the heart are the latest conquered in the moral warfare.

Here lies the distinction between the worldly and the religious man. It is alarm enough for the Christian that he feels any propensities to vice. Against these propensities he watches, strives and prays: and though he is thankful for the victory when he has resisted the temptation, he can feel no elation of heart while conscious of inward dispositions, which nothing but divine grace enables him to keep from breaking out into a flame. He feels that there is no way to obtain the pardon of sin but to leave off sinning: He feels that though repentence is not a Saviour, yet that there can be no salvation where there is no repentance. Above all, he knows that the promise of remission of sin by the death of Christ is the only solid ground of comfort. However correct his present life may be, the weight of past offences would hang so heavy on his conscience, that without the atoning blood of his Redeemer, despair of pardon for the past would leave him hopeless. He would continue to sin, as an extravagant bankrupt, who can get no acquittal, would continue to be extrava-

gant, because no present frugality could redeem his former debts.

It is sometimes pleaded that the labour attached to persons in high public stations, and important employments, by leaving them no time, furnishes a reasonable excuse for the omission of their religious duties. These apologies are never offered for any such neglect in the poor man, though to him every day brings the inevitable return of his twelve hours' labour without intermission and without mitigation.

But surely the more important the station, the higher and wider the sphere of action, the more imperious is the call for religion, not only in the way of example, but even in the way of success; if it be indeed granted that there is such a thing as divine influences, if it be allowed that God has a blessing to bestow. If the ordinary man who has only himself to govern, requires that aid, how urgent is *his* necessity who has to govern millions? What an awful idea, could we even suppose it realized, that the weight of a nation might rest on the head of him whose heart looks not up for a higher support!

Were we alluding to Sovereigns, and not to Statesmen, we need not look beyond the Throne of Great Britain for the instance of a Monarch

who has never made the cares attendant on a King an excuse for neglecting his duty to the King of Kings.

The Politician, the Warrior, and the Orator, find it peculiarly hard to renounce in themselves that wisdom and strength to which they believe that the rest of the world are looking up. The man of station or of genius, when invited to the self-denying duties of Christianity, as well as he who has "great possessions," goes away "sorrowing."

But to know that they must end, stamps vanity on all the glories of life; to know that they must end soon, stamps infatuation, not only on him who sacrifices his conscience for their acquisition, but on him who, though upright in the discharge of his duties, discharges them without any reference to God.—Would the conqueror or the orator reflect when the "laurel crown is placed on his brow, how soon it will be followed by the cypress wreath," it would lower the delirium of ambition, it would cool the intoxication of prosperity.

There is a general kind of belief in Christianity, prevalent among men of the world, which, by soothing the conscience, prevents self-inquiry. That the holy scriptures contain the will of God they do not question; that they contain the best system of morals, they frequently assert: but

they do not feel the necessity of acquiring a correct notion of the doctrines those scriptures involve. The depravity of man, the atonement made by Christ, the assistance of the Holy Spirit —these they consider as the metaphysical part of religion, into which it is not of much importance to enter, and by a species of self-flattery, they satisfy themselves with an idea of acceptableness with their Maker, as a state to be attained without the humility, faith, and newness of life which they require, and which are indeed their proper concomitants.

A man absorbed in a multitude of secular concerns, decent but unawakened, listens, with a kind of respectful insensibility, to the overtures of religion. He considers the Church as venerable from her antiquity, and important from her connexion with the state. No one is more alive to her political, nor more dead to her spiritual importance. He is anxious for her existence, but indifferent to her doctrines. These he considers as a general matter in which he has no individual concern. He considers religious observances as something decorous but unreal; as a grave custom made respectable by public usage, and long prescription. He admits that the poor who have little to enjoy, and the idle who have little to do, cannot do better than make over to God that time

which cannot be turned to a more profitable account. Religion, he thinks, may properly enough employ leisure, and occupy old age. But though both advance towards himself with no imperceptible step, he is still at a loss to determine the precise period when the leisure is sufficient, or the age enough advanced. It recedes as the destined season approaches. He continues to intend moving, but he continues to stand still.

Compare his drowsy sabbaths with the animation of the days of business, you would not think it was the same man. The one are to be got over, the others are enjoyed. He goes from the dull decencies, the shadowy forms, for such they are to him, of public worship, to the solid realities of his worldly concerns, to the cheerful activities of secular life. These he considers as bounden, almost as exclusive duties. The others indeed may not be wrong, but these he is sure are right. The world is his element. Here he breathes freely his native air. Here he is substantially engaged. Here his whole mind is alive, his understanding broad awake, all his energies are in full play ; his mind is all alacrity ; his faculties are employed, his capacities are filled ; here they have an object worthy of their widest expansion. Here his desires and affections are absorbed. The faint impression of the Sunday's Sermon fades away, to be as faintly re-

vived on the Sunday following, again to fade in the succeeding week. To the Sermon he brings a formal ceremonious attendance; to the world he brings all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. To the one he resorts in conformity to law and custom; to induce him to resort to the other, he wants no law, no sanction, no invitation, no argument. His will is of the party. His passions are volunteers. The invisible things of heaven are clouded in shadow, are lost in distance. The world is lord of the ascendant. Riches, honours, power, fill his mind with brilliant images. They are present, they are certain, they are tangible. They assume form and bulk. In these therefore he cannot be mistaken; in the others he may. The eagerness of competition, the struggle for superiority, the perturbations of ambition, fill his mind with an emotion, his soul with an agitation, his affections with an interest, which, though very unlike happiness, he yet flatters himself is the road to it. This factitious pleasure, this tumultuous feeling produces at least that negative satisfaction of which he is constantly in search—it keeps him from himself.

Even in circumstances where there is no success to prevent a very tempting bait, the mere occupation, the crowd of objects, the succession

of engagements, the mingling pursuits, the very tumult and hurry have their gratifications. The bustle gives false peace by leaving no leisure for reflection. He lays his conscience asleep with the "flattering unction" of good intentions. He comforts himself with the creditable pretence of want of time, and the vague resolution of giving up to God the dregs of that life, of the vigorous season of which he thinks the world more worthy. Thus commuting with his Maker, life wears away, its close draws near—and even the poor commutation which was promised is not made. The assigned hour of retreat either never arrives, or if it does arrive, sloth and sensuality are resorted to, as the fair reward of a life of labour and anxiety; and whether he dies in the protracted pursuit of wealth, or in the enjoyment of the luxuries it has earned, he dies in the trammels of the world.

If we do not cordially desire to be delivered from the dominion of these worldly tempers, it is because we do not believe in the condemnation annexed to their indulgence. We may indeed believe it as we believe any other general proposition, or any indifferent fact; but not as a truth in which we have a personal concern; not as a danger which has any reference to *us*. We evince this practical unbelief in the most une-

quivocal way, by thinking so much more about the most frivolous concern in which we are assured we have an interest, than about this most important of all concerns.

Indifference to eternal things, instead of tranquillizing the mind, as it professes to do, is, when a thoughtful moment occurs, a fresh subject of uneasiness; because it adds to our peril the horror of not knowing it. If shutting our eyes to a danger would prevent it, to shut them would not only be a happiness but a duty; but to barter eternal safety for momentary ease, is a wretched compromise. To produce this delusion, mere inconsideration is as efficient a cause as the most prominent sin. The reason why we do not value eternal things is, because we do not think of them. The mind is so full of what is present, that it has no room to admit a thought of what is to come. Not only we do not give that attention to a never-dying soul which prudent men give to a common transaction, but we do not even think it worth the care which inconsiderate men give to an inconsiderable one. We complain that life is short, and yet throw away the best part of it, only making over to religion that portion which is good for nothing else; life would be long enough if we assigned its best period to its best purpose.

Say not that the requisitions of religion are severe, ask rather if they are necessary. If a thing must absolutely be done, if eternal misery will be incurred by not doing it, it is fruitless to enquire whether it be hard or easy. Enquire only whether it be indispensable, whether it be commanded, whether it be practicable. It is a well known axiom in Science, that difficulties are of no weight against demonstrations. The duty on which our eternal state depends, is not a thing to be debated, but done. The duty which is too imperative to be evaded, too important to be neglected, is not to be argued about, but performed. To sin on quietly, because you do not intend to sin always, is to live on a reversion which will probably never be yours.

It is folly to say that Religion drives men to despair; when it only teaches them by a salutary fear to avoid destruction. The fear of God differs from all other fear, for it is accompanied with trust, and confidence, and love. "Blessed is the man that feareth alway" is no paradox to him who entertains this holy fear. It sets him above the fear of ordinary troubles. It fills his heart. He is not discomposed with those inferior apprehensions which unsettle the soul and unhinge the peace of worldly men. His mind is occupied with one grand concern, and is therefore less liable to be shaken than little minds

which are filled with little things. Can that principle lead to despair which proclaims the mercy of God in Christ Jesus to be greater than all the sins of all the men in the world?

If *despair* then prevent your return, add not to your list of offences that of doubting of the forgiveness which is sincerely implored. You have already wronged God in his holiness, wrong him not in his mercy. You may offend him more by despairing of his pardon than by all the sins which have made that pardon necessary. Repentance, if one may venture the bold remark, almost disarms God of the power to punish. Hear his style and title as proclaimed by himself.—"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty"—that is, those who by unrepented guilt exclude themselves from the offered mercy.

If infidelity or indifference, which is practical infidelity, keep you back, yet, as reasonable beings, ask yourselves a few short questions, "for what end was I sent into the world? Is my soul immortal? Am I really placed here in a state of trial, or is this span my all? Is there an eternal state? If there be, will the use I make of this life decide on my condition in that? I

know that there is death, but is there a judgment ?"—

Rest not till you have cleared up, I do not say your own evidences for heaven ;—you have much to do before you arrive at that stage—but whether there be any heaven ? Ask yourself whether Christianity is not important enough to deserve being inquired into ? Whether eternal life is not too valuable to be entirely overlooked ? Whether eternal destruction, if a reality, is not worth avoiding ?—If you make these interrogations sincerely, you will make them practically.—They will lead you to examine your own personal interest in these things. Evils which are ruining us for want of attention to them, lessen, from the moment our attention to them begins. True or false, the question is worth settling. Vibrate then no longer between doubt and certainty. If the evidence be inadmissible, reject it. But if you can once ascertain these cardinal points, then throw away your time if you *can*, then trifle with eternity if you *dare*.*

* An awakening call to public and individual feelings has been recently made by an observation of an eloquent speaker in the house of Commons. He remarked that himself and the honourable Member for Yorkhire, then sitting on a Committee appointed on occasion of a great national calamity, were the only surviving Members of the Committee on a similar occasion twenty-two years ago ! The call is the more alarming, because the mortality did not arise from some extraordinary cause which might not again occur, but was in

It is one of the striking characters of the Omnipotent that "he is strong and patient." It is a standing evidence of his patience that "he is provoked every day." How beautifully do these characters reflect lustre on each other. If he were not strong, his patience would want its distinguishing perfection. If he were not patient, his strength would instantly crush those who provoke him, not sometimes but often; not every year, but "every day."

Oh you, who have a long space given you for repentance, confess that the forbearance of God, when viewed as coupled with his strength, is his most astonishing attribute! Think of the companions of your early life;—if not your associates in actual vice, if not your confederates in guilty pleasures, yet the sharers of your thoughtless meetings, of your convivial revelry, of your worldly schemes, of your ambitious projects,—think how many of them have been cut off, perhaps without warning, probably without repentance. *They* have been presented to their Judge; *their* doom, whatever it be, is irreversibly fixed; yours is mercifully suspended. Adore the mercy: embrace the suspension.

Only suppose if they could be permitted to come back to this world, if they could be al-

the common course of human things. Such a proportion of deaths is perpetually taking place, but the very frequency which ought to excite attention prevents it; till it is thus forced on our notice.

lowed another period of trial, how would they spend their restored life! How cordial would be their penitence, how intense their devotion, how profound their humility, how holy their actions! Think then that you have still in your power that for which they would give millions of worlds. "Hell" says a pious writer, "is truth seen too late."

In almost every mind there sometimes float indefinite and general purposes of repentance. The operation of these purposes is often repelled by a real though disavowed scepticism. "Because sentence is not executed speedily," they suspect it has never been pronounced. They therefore think they may safely continue to defer their intended but unshapen purpose.—Though they sometimes visit the sick beds of others, though they see how much disease disqualifies for all duties, yet to this period of incapacity, to this moment of disqualification do they continue to defer this tremendously important concern.

What an image of the divine condescension does it convey, that "the goodness of God leadeth to repentance!" It does not barely invite, but it conducts. Every warning is more or less an invitation; every visitation is a lighter stroke to avert a heavier blow. This was the way in which the heathen world understood portents and prodigies, and on this interpreta-

tion of them they acted. Any alarming warning, whether rational or superstitious, drove them to their temples, their sacrifices, their expiations. Does our clearer light always carry us farther? Does it in these instances, always carry us as far as natural conscience carried them?

The final period of the worldly man at length arrives; but he will not believe his danger. Even if he fearfully glance round for an intimation of it in every surrounding face, every face, it is too probable, is in a league to deceive him. What a noble opportunity is now offered to the Christian Physician to shew a kindness as far superior to any he has ever shewn, as the concerns of the soul are superior to those of the body! Oh let him not fear *prudently* to reveal a truth for which the patient may bless him in eternity! Is it not sometimes to be feared that in the hope of prolonging for a little while the existence of the perishing body, he robs the never-dying soul of its last chance of pardon? Does not the concern for the immortal part united with his care of the afflicted body, bring the Medical Professor to a nearer imitation than any other supposeable situation can do, of that divine Physician who never healed the one without manifesting a tender concern for the other?

But the deceit is short, is fruitless. The amazed spirit is about to dislodge. Who shall speak its terror and dismay? Then he cries out in the bitterness of his soul, "what capacity has a diseased man, what time has a dying man, what disposition has a sinful man to acquire good principles, to unlearn false notions, to renounce bad practices, to establish right habits, to begin to love God, to begin to hate sin? How is the stupendous concern of salvation to be worked out by a mind incompetent to the most ordinary concerns?"

The infinite importance of what he has to do—the goading conviction that it must be done—the utter inability of doing it—the dreadful combination in his mind of both the necessity and incapacity—the despair of crowding the concerns of an age into a moment—the impossibility of beginning a repentance which should have been completed—of setting about a peace which should have been concluded—of suing for a pardon which should have been obtained;—all these complicated concerns—without strength, without time, without hope, with a clouded memory, a disjointed reason, a wounded spirit, undefined terrors, remembered sins, anticipated punishment, an angry God, an accusing conscience, all together, intolerably augment the sufferings of a body which stands in

little need of the insupportable burthen of a distracted mind to aggravate its torments.

Though we pity the superstitious weakness of the German Emperor in acting over the anticipated solemnities of his own funeral; that eccentric act of penitence of a great but perverted mind; it would be well if we were now and then to represent to our minds while in sound health, the solemn certainties of a dying bed; if we were sometimes to image to ourselves this awful scene, not only as inevitable but as near; if we accustomed ourselves to see things now, as we shall then wish we had seen them. Surely the most sluggish insensibility must be roused by figuring to itself the rapid approach of death, the nearness of our unalterable doom, our instant transition to that state of unutterable bliss or unimaginable woe to which death will in a moment consign us. Such a mental representation would assist us in dissipating the illusion of the senses; would help to realize what is invisible, and to approximate what we think remote. It would disenchant us from the world, tear off her painted mask, shrink her pleasures into their proper dimensions, her concerns into their real value, her enjoyments into their just compass, her promises into nothing.

Terrible as the evil is, if it must, and that at no distant day, be met, spare not to present it to your imagination; not to lacerate your feelings but to arm your resolution; not to excite unprofitable distress, but to strengthen your faith. If it terrify you at first, draw a little nearer to it every time. Familiarity will abate the terror. If you cannot face the image, how will you encounter the reality?

Let us then figure to ourselves the moment (who can say that moment may not be the next?) when all we cling to shall elude our grasp; when every earthly good shall be to us as if it had never been, except in the remembrance of the use we have made of it; when our eyes shall close upon a world of sense, and open on a world of spirits; when there shall be no relief for the fainting body, and no refuge for the parting soul, except that single refuge to which, perhaps, we have never thought of resorting—that refuge which if we have not despised we have too probably neglected—the everlasting mercies of God in Christ Jesus.

Reader! whoever you are, who have neglected to remember that to die is the end for which you were born, know that you have a personal interest in this scene. Turn not away from it in disdain, however feebly it may have been represented. You may escape any other

evil of life, but its end you cannot escape. Defer not then its weightiest concern to its weakest period. Begin not the preparation when you should be completing the work. Delay not the business which demands your best faculties to the period of their debility, probably of their extinction. Leave not the work which requires an age to do, to be done in a moment, a moment too which may not be granted. The alternative is tremendous. The difference is that of being saved or lost. It is no light thing to perish.

CHAP. XIX.

HAPPY DEATHS.

Few circumstances contribute more fatally to confirm in worldly men that insensibility to eternal things which was considered in the preceding Chapter, than the boastful accounts we sometimes hear of the firm and heroic death-beds of popular but irreligious characters. Many causes contribute to these *happy deaths* as they are called. The blind are bold, they do not see the precipice they despise.—Or perhaps there is less unwillingness to quit a world which has so often disappointed them, or which they have sucked to the last dregs. They leave life with less reluctance, feeling that they have exhausted all its gratifications.—Or it is a disbelief of the reality of the state on which they are about to enter.—Or it is a desire to be released from excessive pain, a desire naturally felt by those who calculate their gain, rather

by what they are escaping from, than by what they are to receive.—Or it is equability of temper, or firmness of nerve, or hardness of mind. —Or it is the arrogant wish to make the last act of life confirm its preceding professions.—Or it is the vanity of perpetuating their philosophic character.—Or if some faint ray of light break in, it is the pride of not retracting the sentiments which from pride they have maintained :—the desire of posthumous renown among their own party ; the hope to make their disciples stand firm by their example ; the ambition to give their last possible blow to revelation—or perhaps the fear of expressing doubts which might beget a suspicion that their disbelief was not so sturdy as they would have it thought. Above all, may they not, as a punishment for their long neglect of the warning voice of truth, be given up to a strong delusion to believe the lie they have so often propagated, and really to expect to find in death that eternal sleep with which they have affected to quiet their own consciences, and have really weakened the faith of others.

Every new instance is an additional buttress on which the sceptical school lean for support, and which they produce as a fresh triumph. With equal satisfaction they collect stories of infirmity, depression and want of courage in the dying hour of religious men, whom the nature

of the disease, timorousness of spirit, profound humility, the sad remembrance of sin, though long repented of, and forgiven, a deep sense of the awfulness of meeting God in judgment;—whom some or all of these causes may occasion to depart in trembling fear; in whom, though heaviness may endure through the night of death, yet joy cometh in the morning of the resurrection.

It is a maxim of the Civil Law that definitions are hazardous. And it cannot be denied that various descriptions of persons have hazarded much in their definitions of a *happy death.* A very able and justly admired writer, who has distinguished himself by the most valuable works on political economy, has recorded, as proofs of the happy death of a no less celebrated contemporary, that he cheerfully amused himself in his last hours with LUCIAN, A GAME of WHIST, and some good humoured drollery upon CHARON and his boat.

But may we not venture to say, with "one of the People called Christians,"* himself a Wit and Philosopher, though of the School of Christ, that the man who could meet death in such a frame of mind "might smile over Babylon in ruins, esteem the Earthquake which destroyed

* The late excellent Bishop Horne. See his Letters to Dr. Adam Smith.

Lisbon an agreeable occurrence, and congratulate the hardened Pharaoh on his overthrow in the Red Sea ?"

This eminent Historian and Philosopher, whose great intellectual powers it is as impossible not to admire, as not to lament their unhappy misapplication, has been eulogised by his friend, as coming nearer than almost any other man, to the perfection of human nature in his life ; and has been almost deified for the cool courage and heroic firmness with which he met death. His eloquent Panegyrist, with as insidious an innuendo as has ever been thrown out against revealed religion, goes on to observe that, " perhaps it is one of the very worst circumstances against Christianity, that very few of its professors were ever either so moral, so humane, or could so philosophically govern their passions, as the sceptical David Hume."

Yet notwithstanding this rich embalming of so noble a compound of "matter and motion," we must be permitted to doubt one of the two things presented for our admiration ; we must either doubt the so much boasted happiness of his death, or the so much extolled humanity of his heart. We must be permitted to suspect the soundness of that benevolence which led him to devote his latest hours to prepare, under the label of *an Essay on Suicide*, a potion for pos-

terity, of so deleterious a quality, that if taken by the patient, under all the circumstances, in which he undertakes to prove it innocent, might have gone near to effect the extinction of the whole human race. For if all rational beings, according to this posthumous prescription, are at liberty to procure their own release from life "under pain or sickness, shame or poverty," how large a portion of the world would be authorized to quit it uncalled! For how many are subject to the two latter grievances; from the two former how few are altogether exempt!*

The energy of that ambition which could concentrate the last efforts of a powerful mind, the last exertions of a spirit greedy of fame, into a project, not only for destroying the souls, but for abridging the lives of his fellow-creatures, leaves at a disgraceful distance the inverted thirst of glory of the man, who, to imortalize his own name, set fire to the Temple at Ephesus. Such a burning zeal to annihilate the eternal hope of his fellow-creatures might be

* Another part of the *Essay on Suicide* has this passage.—"Whenever pain or sorrow so far overcome my patience, as to make me tired of life, I may conclude that I am recalled from my station in the plainest and most express terms."—And again—"When I fall upon my own sword, I receive my death equally from the hands of the Deity, as if it had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever."—And again—"Where is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood from their natural channel?"

philosophy; but surely to authorize them to curtail their mortal existence, which to the infidel who looks for no other, must be invaluable, was not philanthropy.

But if this death was thought worthy of being blazoned to the public eye in all the warm and glowing colours with which affection decorates panegyric, the disciples of the same school have been in general anxiously solicitous to produce only the more creditable instances of invincible hardness of heart, while they have laboured to cast an impenetrable veil over the closing scene of those among the less inflexible of the fraternity, who have exhibited in their departing moments, any symptoms of doubt, any indications of distrust, respecting the validity of their principles :—Principles which they had long maintained with so much zeal, and disseminated with so much industry.

In spite of the sedulous anxiety of his Satellites to conceal the clouded setting of the great luminary of modern infidelity, from which so many minor stars have filled their little urns, and then set up for original lights themselves; in spite of the pains taken—for we must drop metaphor—to shroud from all eyes, except those of the initiated, the terror and dismay with which the Philosopher of Geneva met death, met his summons to appear before that

God whose providence he had ridiculed, that Saviour whose character and offices he had vilified,—the secret was betrayed. In spite of the precautions taken by his associates to bury in congenial darkness the agonies which in his last hours contradicted the audacious blasphemies of a laborious life spent in their propagation, at last, like his great instigator, he *believed and trembled.*

Whatever the sage of Ferney might be in the eyes of Journalists, of Academicians, of Encyclopœdists, of the Royal Author of Berlin, of Revolutionists in the egg of his own hatching, of full grown infidels of his own spawning; of a world into which he had been for more than half a century industriously infusing a venom, the effects of which will be long felt, the expiring philosopher was no object of veneration to his NURSE.—She could have recorded "a tale to harrow up the soul," the horrors of which were sedulously attempted to be consigned to oblivion. But for this woman and a few other unbribed witnesses, his friends would probably have endeavoured to edify the world with this addition to the brilliant catalogue of *happy deaths*.*

* It is a well attested fact that this woman, after his decease, being sent for to attend another person in dying circumstances, anxiously enquired if the patient was a Gentleman, for that she had

It has been a not uncommon opinion that the works of an able and truly pious Christian, by their happy tendency to awaken the careless and to convince the unbelieving, may, even for ages after the excellent Author is entered into his eternal rest, by the accession of new Converts which they bring to Christianity, continue to add increasing brightness to the crown of the already glorified saint.—If this be true, how shall imagination presume to conceive, much less how shall language express, what must be expected in the contrary case? How shall we dare turn our thoughts to the progressive torments which may be ever heaping on the heads of those unhappy men of genius, who having devoted their rare talents to promote vice and infidelity, continue with fatal success to make successive proselytes through successive ages, if their works last so long, and

recently been so dreadfully terrified in witnessing the dying horrors of Mons. de Voltaire, which surpassed all description, that she had resolved never to attend any other person of that sex unless she could be assured that he was not a philosopher.—Voltaire indeed as he was deficient in the moral honesty and the other good qualities which obtained for Mr. Hume the affection of his friends, wanted his sincerity. Of all his other vices hypocrisy was the consummation. While he daily dishonoured the Redeemer by the invention of unheard of blasphemies; after he had bound himself by a solemn pledge never to rest till he had exterminated his very name from the face of the earth, he was not ashamed to assist regularly at the awful commemoration of his death at the Altar!

thus accumulate on themselves anguish ever growing, miseries ever multiplying, without hope of any mitigation, without hope of any end.

A more recent instance of the temper and spirit which the College of Infidelity exhibits on these occasions is perhaps less generally known. A person of our own time and country, of high rank and talents, and who ably filled a great public situation, had unhappily, in early life, imbibed principles and habits analogous to those of a notoriously profligate society of which he was a member, a society, of which the very appellation it delighted to distinguish itself by, is

Offence and torture to the sober ear.

In the near view of death, at an advanced age, deep remorse and terror took possession of his soul; but he had no friend about him to whom he could communicate the state of his mind, or from whom he could derive either counsel or consolation. One day in the absence of his attendants, he raised his exhausted body on his dying bed, and threw himself on the floor, where he was found in great agony of spirit, with a prayer book in his hand. This detection was at once a subject for ridicule and regret to his colleagues, and he was contemptuously spoken of

as a pusillanimous deserter from the *good cause.* The phrase used by them to express their displeasure at his apostacy is too offensive to find a place here.* Were we called upon to decide between rival horrors, we should feel no hesitation in pronouncing this death a less unhappy one than those to which we have before alluded.

Another well known sceptic, while in perfect health, took measures by a special order, to guard against any intrusion in his last sickness, by which he might, even in the event of delirium, betray any doubtful apprehension that there might be an hereafter; or in any other way be surprised in uttering expressions of terror, and thus exposing the state of his mind, in case any such revolution should take place, which his heart whispered him might possibly happen.

But not only in those *happy deaths* which close a life of avowed impiety, is there great room for suspicion, but even in cases where without acknowledged infidelity, there has been a careless life; when in such cases we hear of a sudden death-bed revolution, of much seeming contrition, succeeded by extraordinary professions of joy and triumph, we should be very cautious of pronouncing on their real state. Let us rather leave the penitent of a day to that

* The writer had this anecdote from an acquaintance of the noble person at the time of his death.

mercy against which he has been sinning through a whole life. These "Clinical Converts" (to borrow a favorite phrase of the eloquent Bishop Taylor) may indeed be true penitents; but how shall we pronounce them to be so? How can we conclude that "they are dead unto sin" unless they be spared to "live unto righteousness"?

Happily we are not called upon to decide. He to whose broad eye the future and the past lie open, as he has been their constant witness, so will he be their unerring judge.*

But the admirers of certain *happy deaths* do not even pretend that any such change appeared in the friends of whom they make not so much the panegyric as the apotheosis. They would even think repentance a derogation from the dignity of their character. They pronounce them to have been good enough as they were; insisting that they have a *demand* for happiness upon God, if there be any such Being; a *claim* upon heaven

* The primitive church carried their incredulity of the appearances of repentance so far as to require not only years of sorrow for sin, but perseverance in piety, before they would admit offenders to their communion; and as a test of their sincerity, required the uniform practice of those virtues most opposite to their former vices—were this made the criterion now, we should not so often hear such flaming accounts of converts, so exultingly reported, before time has been allowed to try their stability. More especially we should not hear of so many triumphant relations of death-bed converts, in whom the symptoms must frequently be too equivocal to admit the positive decision of human wisdom.

if there be any such place. They are satisfied that their friend, after a life spent "without God in the world, without evidencing any marks of a changed heart, without even affecting any thing like repentance, without intimating that there was any call for it, DIED PRONOUNCING HIMSELF HAPPY.

But nothing is more suspicious than a *happy death*, where there has neither been religion in the life nor humility in its close, where its course has been without piety, and its termination without repentance.

Others in a still bolder strain, disdaining the posthumous renown to be conferred by survivors, of their *having* died happily, prudently secure their own fame, and changing both the tense and the person usual in monumental Inscriptions, with prophetic confidence record on their own sepulchral marble, that they *shall* die not only "HAPPY" but "GRATEFUL"—the prescience of philosophy thus assuming as certain what the humble spirit of Christianity only presumes to hope.

There is another reason to be assigned for the charitable error of indiscriminately consigning our departed acquaintance to certain happiness. Affliction, as it is a tender, so it is a misleading feeling, especially in minds naturally soft, and

but slightly tinctured with religion. The death of a friend awakens the kindest feelings of the heart. But by exciting true sorrow, it often excites false charity. Grief naturally softens every fault, love as naturally heightens every virtue. It is right and kind to consign error to oblivion, but not to immortality. Charity indeed we owe to the dead as well as to the living, but not that erroneous charity by which truth is violated, and undeserved commendation lavished on those whom truth could no longer injure. To calumniate the dead is even worse than to violate the rights of sepulture; not to vindicate calumniated worth, when it can no longer vindicate itself, is a crime next to that of attacking it;*

* What a generous instance of that disinterested attachment which survives the grave of its object, and piously rescues his reputation from the assaults of malignity, was given by the late excellent Bishop Porteus, in his animated defence of Archbishop Secker! May his own fair fame never stand in need of any such warm vindication, which, however, it could not fail to find in the bosom of every good man!—The fine talents of this lamented prelate, uniformly devoted to the purposes for which God gave them—his life directed to those duties to which his high professional station called him—his Christian graces—those engaging manners which shed a soft lustre on the firm fidelity of his friendships—that kindness which was ever flowing from his heart to his lips—the benignity and candour which distinguished not his conversation only, but his conduct—these, and all those amiable qualities, that gentle temper and correct cheerfulness with which he adorned society, will ever endear his memory to all who knew him intimately; and let his friends remember, that to imitate his virtues will be the best proof of their remembering them.

but on the dead, charity, though well understood, is often mistakingly exercised.

If we were called upon to collect the greatest quantity of hyperbole—falsehood might be too harsh a term—in the least given time and space, we should do well to search for it in those sacred edifices expressly consecrated to truth. There we should see the ample mass of canonizing kindness which fills their mural decorations, expressed in all those flattering records inscribed by every variety of motive to every variety of claim. In addition to what is dedicated to real merit by real sorrow, we should hear of tears which were never shed, grief which was never felt, praise which was never earned; we should see what is raised by the decent demands of connection, by tender, but undiscerning friendship, by poetic licence, by eloquent gratitude for testamentary favours.

It is an amiable though not a correct feeling in human nature, that, fancying we have not done justice to certain characters during their lives, we run into the error of supposed compensation by over estimating them after their decease.

On account of neighborhood, affinity, long acquaintance, or some pleasing qualities, we may have entertained a kindness for many persons,

of whose state however, while they lived, we could not, with the utmost stretch of charity, think favourably. If their sickness has been long and severe, our compassion having been kept by that circumstance in a state of continual excitement; though we lament their death, yet we feel thankful that their suffering is at an end. Forgetting our former opinion, and the course of life on which it was framed, we fall into all the common places of consolation—"God is merciful—we trust that they are at rest—what a happy release they have had!"—Nay, it is well if we do not go so far as to entertain a kind of vague belief that their better qualities joined to their sufferings have, on the whole, ensured their felicity.

Thus at once losing sight of that word of God which cannot lie, of our former regrets on their subject, losing the remembrance of their defective principles, and thoughtless conduct; without any reasonable ground for altering our opinion, any pretence for entertaining a better hope—we assume that they are happy. We reason as if we believed that the suffering of the body had purchased the salvation of the soul, as if it had rendered any doubt almost criminal. We seem to make ourselves easy on the falsest ground imaginable, not because we believe their

hearts were changed, but because they are now beyond all possibility of change.

But surely the mere circumstance of death will not have rendered them fit for that heaven for which we before feared they were unfit. Far be it from us, indeed, blind and sinful as we are, to pass sentence upon *them*, to pass sentence upon *any*. We dare not venture to pronounce what may have passed between God and their souls, even at the last hour. We know that infinite mercy is not restricted to times or seasons; to an early or a late repentance; we know not but in that little interval their peace was made, their pardon granted, through the atoning blood, and powerful intercession of their Redeemer. Nor should we too scrupulously pry into the state of others, never, indeed, except to benefit them or ourselves; we should rather imitate the example of Christ, who at once gave an admirable lesson of meekness and charitable judgment, when avoiding an answer which might have led to fruitless discussion, he gave a reproof under the shape of an exhortation.—In reply to the inquiry, "are there few that be saved," he thus checked vain curiosity—"Strive (you) to enter in at the strait gate." On another occasion, in the same spirit, he corrected inquisitiveness, not by an answer, but by an interrogation and a

precept—"What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

But where there is strong ground to apprehend that the contrary may have been the case, it is very dangerous to pronounce peremptorily on the safety of the dead. Because if we allow ourselves to be fully persuaded that they are entered upon a state of happiness, it will naturally and fatally tempt us to lower our own standard. If we are ready to conclude that *they* are now in a state of glory whose principles we believed to be incorrect, whose practice, to say the least of it, we know to be negligent, who, without our indulging a censorious or a presumptuous spirit, we thought lived in a state of mind, and a course of habits, not only far from right, but even avowedly inferior to our own; will not this lead to the conclusion, either that we ourselves, standing on so much higher ground, are in a very advanced state of grace, or that a much lower than ours may be a state of safety? And will not such a belief tend to slacken our endeavours, and to lower our tone, both of faith and practice?

By this conclusion we contradict the affecting assertion of a very sublime poet,

> For us they sicken and for us they die.

For while we are thus taking and giving false comfort, our friend as to us will have died in

vain. Instead of his death having operated as a warning voice, to rouse us to a more animated piety, it will be rather likely to lull us into a dangerous security. If our affection has so blinded our judgment, we shall by the indulgence of a false candour to another, sink into a false peace ourselves.

It will be a wounding circumstance to the feelings of surviving friendship, to see a person of loose habits, whom though we loved yet we feared to admonish, and that, because we loved him; for, whom though we saw his danger, yet perhaps we neglected to pray; to see him brought to that ultimate and fixed state in which admonition is impossible, in which prayer is not only fruitless, but unlawful.

Another distressing circumstance frequently occurs. We meet with affectionate but irreligious parents, who though kind and perhaps amiable, have neither lived themselves nor educated their families in Christian principles, nor in habits of Christian piety. A child at the age of maturity dies. Deep is the affliction of the doating parent. The world is a blank. He looks round for comfort where he has been accustomed to look for it, among his friends. He finds it not. He looks up for it where he has not been accustomed to seek it. Neither his

heart nor his treasure has been laid up in heaven. Yet a paroxysm, of what may be termed natural devotion, gives to his grief an air of piety. The first cry of anguish is commonly religious.

The lamented object perhaps, through utter ignorance of the awful gulph which was opening to receive him, added to a tranquil temper, might have expired without evidencing any great distress, and his *happy death* is industriously proclaimed through the neighborhood, and the mourning parents have only to wish that their latter end may be like his. They cheat at once their sorrow and their souls, with the soothing notion that they shall soon meet their beloved child in heaven. Of this they persuade themselves as firmly and as fondly, as if both they and the object of their grief had been living in the way which leads thither. Oh for that unbought treasure, a sincere, a real friend, who might lay hold on the propitious moment! When the heart is softened by sorrow, it might possibly, if ever, be led to its true remedy. This would indeed be a more unequivocal, because more painful act of friendship, than pouring in the lulling opiate of false consolation, which we are too ready to administer, because it saves our own feelings while it soothes, without healing, those of the mourner.

But perhaps the integrity of the friend conquers his timidity. Alas! he is honestly explicit to unattending or to offended ears.—They refuse to hear the voice of the charmer. But if the mourners will not endure the voice of exhortation now, while there is hope, how will they endure the sound of the last trumpet when hope is at an end? If they will not bear the gentle whispers of friendship, how will they bear the voice of the accusing angel, the terrible sentence of the incensed Judge? If private reproof be intolerable, how will they stand the being made a spectacle to angels and to men, even to the whole assembled universe, to the whole creation of God?

But instead of converting the friendly warning to their eternal benefit, they are probably wholly bent on their own vindication. Still their character is dearer to them than their soul.—"We never," say they, "were any man's enemy."—Yes—you have been the enemy of all to whom you have given a bad example. You have especially been the enemy of your children in whom you have implanted no Christian principles. Still they insist with the prophet that "there is no iniquity in them that can be called iniquity." "We have wronged no one," say they, "we have given to every one his due.

We have done our duty." Your first duty was to God. You have robbed your Maker of the service due to him. You have robbed your Redeemer of the souls he died to save. You have robbed your own soul and too probably the souls of those whom you have so wretchedly educated, of eternal happiness.

Thus the flashes of religion which darted in upon their conscience in the first burst of sorrow too frequently die away; they expire before the grief which kindled them. They resort again to their old resource the world, which if it cannot soon heal their sorrow, at least soon diverts it.

To shut our eyes upon death as an object of terror or of hope, and to consider it only as a release or an extinction, is viewing it under a character which is not its own. But to get rid of the idea at any rate, and then boast that we do not fear the thing we do not think of, is not difficult. Nor is it difficult to think of it without alarm if we do not include its consequences. But to him who frequently repeats, not mechanically but devoutly, "we know that THOU shalt "come to be our Judge," death cannot be a matter of indifference.

Another cause of these *happy deaths* is that many think salvation a slight thing, that heaven is cheaply obtained, that a merciful God is easily

pleased, that we are Christians, and that mercy comes of course to those who have always profest to believe that Christ died to purchase it for them. This notion of God being more merciful than he has any where declared himself to be, instead of inspiring them with more gratitude to him, inspires more confidence in themselves. This corrupt faith generates a corrupt morality. It leads to this strange consequence, not to make them love God better, but to venture on offending him more.

People talk as if the act of death made a complete change in the nature, as well as in the condition of man. Death is the vehicle to another state of being, but possesses no power to qualify us for that state. In conveying us to a new world it does not give us a new heart. It puts the unalterable stamp of decision on the character, but does not transform it into a character diametrically opposite.

Our affections themselves will be rather raised than altered. Their tendencies will be the same though their advancement will be incomparably higher. They will be exalted in their degree but not changed in their nature. They will be purified from all earthly mixtures, cleansed from all human pollutions, the principle will be cleared from its imperfections, but it will not become another principle. He that is unholy will not be

made holy by death. The heart will not have a new object to seek, but will be directed more intensely to the same object.

They who loved God here will love him far more in heaven, because they will know him far better. There he will reign without a competitor. They who served him here in sincerity will there serve him in perfection. If "the pure in heart shall see God," let us remember that this purity is not to be contracted after we have been admitted to its remuneration. The beatitude is pledged as a reward for the purity, not as a qualification for it. Purity will be sublimated in heaven, but will not begin to be produced there. It is to be acquired by passing through the refiner's fire here, not through the penal and expiatory fire which human ingenuity devised to purge offending man,

From the foul deeds done in his days of nature!

The extricated spirit will be separated from the feculence of all that belongs to sin, to sense, to self. We shall indeed find ourselves new, because spiritualized beings; but if the cast of the mind were not in a great measure the same, how should we retain our identity? The soul will there become that which it here desired to be, that which it mourned because it was so far from being. It will have obtained that complete

victory over its corruptions which it here only desired, which it here only struggled to obtain.

Here our love of spiritual things is superinduced, there it will be our natural frame. The impression of God on our hearts will be stamped deeper, but it will not be a different impression. Our obedience will be more voluntary, because there will be no rival propensities to obstruct it. It will be more entire, because it will have to struggle with no counteracting force.—Here we sincerely though imperfectly love the law of God, even though it controls our perverse will, though it contradicts our corruptions. There our love will be complete, because our will will retain no perverseness, and our corruptions will be done away.

Repentance, precious at all seasons, in the season of health is noble. It is a generous principle when it overtakes us surrounded with the prosperities of life, when it is not put off till distress drives us to it. Seriousness of spirit is most acceptable to God when danger is out of sight, preparation for death when death appears to be at a distance.

Virtue and piety are founded on the nature of things, on the laws of God, not on any vicissitudes in human circumstances. Irreligion, folly and vice are just as unreasonable in the meridian of life as at the approach of death. They strike

us differently but they always retain their own character. Every argument against an irreligious death is equally cogent against an irreligious life. Piety and penitence may be quickened by the near view of death, but the reasons for practising them are not founded on its nearness. Death may stimulate our fears for the consequences of vice, but furnishes no motive for avoiding it, which Christianity had not taught before. The necessity of religion is as urgent now as it will be when we are dying. It may not appear so, but the reality of a thing does not depend on appearances. Besides, if the necessity of being religious depended on the approach of death, what moment of our lives is there, in which we have any security against it? In every point of view therefore, the same necessity for being religious subsists when we are in full health as when we are about to die.

We may then fairly arrive at this conclusion, that there is no *happy death* but that which conducts to a *happy immortality*;—No joy in putting off the body, if we have not put on the Lord Jesus Christ—No consolation in escaping from the miseries of time till we have obtained a well grounded hope of a blessed eternity.

CHAP. XX.

ON THE SUFFERINGS OF GOOD MEN.

AFFLICTION is the school in which great virtues are acquired, in which great characters are formed. It is a kind of moral Gymnasium, in which the disciples of Christ are trained to robust exercise, hardy exertion, and severe conflict.

We do not hear of martial heroes in "the calm and piping time of peace," nor of the most eminent saints in the quiet and unmolested periods of ecclesiastical history. We are far from denying that the principle of courage in the warrior, or of piety in the saint continues to subsist, ready to be brought into action when perils beset the country or trials assail the church; but it must be allowed that in long periods of inaction, both are liable to decay.

The Christian, in our comparatively tranquil day, is happily exempt from the trials and the terrors which the annals of persecution record. Thanks to the establishment of a pure Chris-

tianity in the Church, thanks to the infusion of the same pure principle into our laws, and to the mild and tolerating spirit of both—a man is so far from being liable to pains and penalties for his attachment to his religion, that he is protected in its exercise ; and were certain existing statutes enforced, he would even incur penalties for his violation of religious duties, rather than for his observance of them*.

Yet still the Christian is not exempt from his individual, his appropriate, his undefined trials. We refer not merely to those "cruel mockings," which the acute sensibility of the Apostle led him to rank in the same catalogue with bonds, imprisonments, exile and martyrdom itself. We allude not altogether to those misrepresentations and calumnies to which the zealous Christian is peculiarly liable ; nor exclusively to those difficulties to which his very adherence to the principles he professes, must necessarily subject him ; nor entirely to those occasional sacrifices of credit, of advancement, of popular applause ; to which his refusing to sail with the tide of popular opinion may compel him ; nor solely to the disadvantages which under certain circumstances his not preferring expediency to principle may expose him. But

* We allude to the laws against swearing, attending public worship, &c.

the truly good man is not only often called to struggle with trials of large dimensions, with exigencies of obvious difficulty, but to encounter others which are better understood than defined,

> And duller would he be than the fat weed
> That rots itself at ease on Lethe's wharf,

were he left to batten undisturbed, in peaceful security on the unwholesome pastures of rank prosperity. The thick exhalations drawn up from this gross soil render the atmosphere so heavy as to obstruct the ascent of piety, her flagging pinions are kept down by the influence of this moist vapour; she is prevented from soaring,

> to live insphered
> In regions mild of calm and serene air,
> Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
> Which men call earth.

The pampered Christian thus continually gravitating to the earth, would have his heart solely bent to

> Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,
> Unmindful of the crown *religion* gives
> After this mortal change, to her true servants.

It is an unspeakable blessing that no events are left to the choice of beings, who from their blindness would seldom fail to chuse amiss. Were circumstances at our own disposal we should allot ourselves nothing but ease

and success, but riches and fame, but protracted youth, perpetual health, unvaried happiness.

All this, as it would be very unnatural, so perhaps it would not be very wrong, for beings who were always to live on earth. But for beings who are placed here in a state of trial and not established in their final home, whose condition in eternity depends on the use they make of time, nothing would be more dangerous than such a power, nothing more fatal than the consequences to which such a power would lead.

If a surgeon were to put into the hand of a wounded patient the probe or the lancet, with how much false tenderness would he treat himself! How skin-deep would be the examination, how slight the incision! The patient would escape the pain, but the wound might prove mortal. The practitioner therefore wisely uses his instruments himself. He goes deep perhaps, but not deeper than the case demands. The pain may be acute, but the life is preserved.

Thus He in whose hands we are, is too good, and loves us too well to trust us with ourselves. He knows that we will not contradict our own inclinations, that we will not impose on ourselves any thing unpleasant, that we will not inflict on ourselves any voluntary pain, however necessary the infliction, however

salutary the effect. God graciously does this for us himself, or he knows it would never be done.

A Christian is liable to the same sorrows and sufferings with other men: He has no where any promise of immunity from the troubles of life, but he has a merciful promise of support under them. He considers them in another view, he bears them with another spirit, he improves them to other purposes than those whose views are bounded by this world. Whatever may be the instruments of his suffering, whether sickness, losses, calumnies, persecutions, he knows that it proceeds from God; all means are HIS instruments. All inferior causes operate by HIS directing hand.

We said that a Christian is liable to the same sufferings with other men. Might we not repeat what we have before said, that his very Christian profession is often the cause of his sufferings? They are the badge of his discipleship, the evidences of his father's love; they are at once the marks of God's favour, and the materials of his own future happiness.

What were the arguments of worldly advantage held out through the whole New-Testament to induce the world to embrace the religion it taught? What was the condition of St. Paul's introduction to Christianity? It was not

—I will crown him with honour and prosperity, with dignity and pleasure, but—"I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

What were the virtues which Christ chiefly taught in his discourses? What were the graces he most recommended by his example? Self-denial, mortification, patience, long-suffering, renouncing ease and pleasure. These are the marks which have ever since its first appearance, distinguished christianity from all the religions in the world, and on that account evidently prove its divine original. Ease, splendour, external prosperity, conquest, made no part of its establishment. Other empires have been founded in the blood of the vanquished, the dominion of Christ was founded in his own blood. Most of the beatitudes which infinite compassion pronounced, have the sorrows of earth for their subject but the joys of heaven for their completion.

To establish this religion in the world, the Almighty, as his own word assures us, subverted kingdoms and altered the face of nations. "For thus saith the Lord of Hosts" (by his prophet Haggai) "yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall

come." Could a religion, the kingdom of which was to be founded by such awful means, be established, be perpetuated, without involving the sufferings of its subjects?

If the Christian course had been meant for a path of roses, would the life of the Author of Christianity have been a path strewed with thorns? "He made for us," says Bishop Jeremy Taylor, "a covenant of sufferings, his very promises were sufferings, his rewards were sufferings, and his arguments to invite men to follow him were only taken from sufferings in this life and the reward of sufferings hereafter."

But if no prince but the prince of peace ever set out with a proclamation of the reversionary nature of his empire—if no other king, to allay avarice and check ambition, ever invited subjects by the unalluring declaration that "his kingdom was not of this world"—if none other ever declared that it was not dignity or honours, valour or talents that made them "worthy of him," but "taking up the cross"—if no other ever made the sorrows which would attend his followers a motive for their attachment—yet no other ever had the goodness to promise, or th power to make his promise good, that he would give "rest to the heavy laden." Other sovereigns have "overcome the world" for their own ambition, but none besides

ever thought of making the "tribulation" which should be the effect of that conquest, a ground for animating the fidelity of his followers—ever thought of bidding them "be of good cheer," because he had overcome the world in a sense which was to make his subjects lose all hope of rising in it.

The Apostle to the Philippians enumerated it among the honours and distinctions prepared for his most favoured converts, not only that "they should believe in Christ" but that they should also "suffer for him." Any other religion would have made use of such a promise as an argument to deter, not to attract. That a religion should flourish the more under such discouraging invitations, with the threat of even degrading circumstances and absolute losses, is an unanswerable evidence that it was of no human origin.

It is among the mercies of God, that he strengthens the virtues of his servants by hardening them under the cold and bracing climate of adverse fortune, instead of leaving them to languish under the shining but withering sun of unclouded prosperity. When they cannot be attracted to him by gentler influences, he sends these salutary storms and tempests, which purify while they alarm. Our gracious Father

knows that eternity is long enough for his children to be happy in.

The character of Christianity may be seen by the very images of military conflict, under which the scriptures so frequently exhibit it. Suffering is the initiation into a Christian's calling. It is his education for heaven. Shall the scholar rebel at the discipline which is to fit him for his profession, or the soldier at the exercise which is to qualify him for victory?

But the Christian's trials do not all spring from without. He would think them comparatively easy, had he only the opposition of men to struggle against, or even the severer dispensations of God to sustain? If he has a conflict with the world, he has a harder conflict with sin. His bosom foe is his most unyielding enemy;

> His warfare is within, there unfatigued
> His fervent spirit labours.

This it is which makes his other trials heavy, which makes his power of sustaining them weak, which renders his conquest over them slow and inconclusive; which too often solicits him to oppose interest to duty, indolence to resistance, and self-indulgence to victory.

This world is the stage on which worldly men more exclusively act, and the things of the world, and the applause of the world, are the

rewards which they propose to themselves. These they often attain—with these they are satisfied. They aim at no higher end, and of their aim they are not disappointed. But let not the Christian repine at the success of those whose motives he rejects, whose practices he dares not adopt, whose ends he deprecates. If he feel any disposition to murmur when he sees the irreligious in great prosperity, let him ask himself if he would tread their path to attain their end—if he would do their work to obtain their wages? He knows he would not. Let him then cheerfully leave them to scramble for the prizes, and jostle for the places, which the world temptingly holds out, but which he will not purchase at the world's price.

Consult the page of History, and observe, not only if the best men have been the most successful, but even if they have not often eminently failed in great enterprizes, undertaken perhaps on the purest principles; while unworthy instruments have been often employed, not only to produce dangerous revolutions, but to bring about events ultimately tending to the public benefit; enterprizes in which good men feared to engage, which perhaps they were not competent to effect, or in effecting which they might have wounded their conscience and endangered their souls.

Good causes are not always conducted by good men. A good cause may be connected with something that is not good, with party for instance. Party often does that for virtue, which virtue is not able to do for herself; and thus the right cause is promoted and effected by some subordinate, even by some wrong motive. A worldly man, connecting himself with a religious cause, gives it that importance in the eyes of the world, which neither its own rectitude, nor that of its religious supporters, had been able to give it. Nay the very piety of its advocates—for worldly men always connect piety with imprudence—had brought the wisdom, or at least the *expediency* of the cause into suspicion, and it is at last carried by a means foreign to itself. The character of the cause must be lowered, we had almost said, it must in a certain degree be deteriorated, to suit the general taste, even to obtain the approbation of that multitude for whose benefit it is intended.

How long, as we have had occasion to observe in another connexion, had the world groaned under the most tremendous Engine which superstition and despotism, in dreadful confederation, ever contrived to force the consciences, and torture the bodies of men; where racks were used for persuasion, and flames for arguments! The best of men for ages have

been mourning under this dread Tribunal, without being competent to effect its overthrow; the worst of men has been able to accomplish it with a word.—It is a humiliating lesson for good men when they thus see how entirely instrumentality may be separated from personal virtue.

We still fall into the error of which the Prophet so long ago complained, "we call the proud happy," and the wicked fortunate, and our hearts are too apt to rise at their successes. We pretend indeed that they rise with indignation; but is it not to be feared that with this indignation is mixed a little envy, a little rebellion against God? We murmur, though we know that when the instrument has finished his work, the divine employer throws him by, cuts him off, lets him perish.

But you envy him in the midst of that work, to accomplish which he has sacrificed every principle of justice, truth, and mercy. Is this a man to be envied? Is this a prosperity to be grudged? Would you incur the penalties of that happiness at which you are not ashamed to murmur?

But is it happiness to commit sin, to be abhorred by good men, to offend God, to ruin his own soul? Do you really consider a temporary success a recompense for deeds which will in-

sure eternal woe to the perpetrator? *Is* the successful bad man happy? Of what materials then is happiness made up? Is it composed of a disturbed mind and an unquiet conscience? Are doubt and difficulty, are terror and apprehension, are distrust and suspicion, felicities for which a Christian would renounce his peace, would displease his Maker, would risk his Soul? Think of the hidden vulture that feeds on the vitals of successful wickedness, and your repinings, your envy, if you are so unhappy as to feel envy, will cease. Your indignation will be converted into compassion, your execrations into prayer.

But if he feel neither the scourge of conscience nor the sting of remorse, pity him the more. Pity him for the very want of that addition to his unhappiness: for if he added to his miseries that of anticipating his punishment, he might be led by repentance to avoid it. Can you reckon the blinding his eyes and the hardening his heart, any part of his happiness? Thi sopinion, however, you practically adopt, whenever you grudge the prosperity of the wicked. God, by delaying the punishment of bad men, for which *we* are so impatient, may have designs of mercy of which we know nothing—mercy perhaps to them, or if not to them, yet mercy to those who are suffering by

them, and whom he intends by these bad instruments, to punish, and, by punishing, eventually to save.

There is another sentiment which prosperous wickedness excites in certain minds, that is almost more preposterous than envy itself, and that is respect; but this feeling is never raised unless both the wickedness and the prosperity be on a grand scale.

This sentiment also is founded in secret impiety, in the belief either that God does not govern human affairs, or that the motives of actions are not regarded by him, or that prosperity is a certain proof of his favour, or that where there is success there must be worth. These flatterers however forsake the prosperous with their good fortune; their applause is withheld with the success which attracted it. As they were governed by events in their admiration, so events lead them to withdraw it.

But in this admiration there is a bad taste as well as a bad principle. If ever wickedness pretends to excite any idea of sublimity, it must be, not in its elevation but its fall. If ever Caius Marius raises any such sentiment, it is not when he carried the world before him, it is not in his seditious and bloody triumphs at Rome, but it is when in poverty and exile his intrepid look caused the dagger to drop from

the hand of the executioner ;—it is, when sitting among the venerable ruins of Carthage he enjoyed a desolation so congenial to his own.—Dionysius, in the plenitude of arbitrary power, raises our unmixed abhorrence. We detest the oppressor of the people while he continued to trample on them ; we execrate the Monster who was not ashamed to sell Plato as a slave. If ever we feel any thing like interest on his subject, it is not with the Tyrant of Syracuse but with the School-Master of Corinth.

But though God may be patient with triumphant wickedness, he does not wink or connive at it. Between being permitted and supported, between being employed and approved, the distance is wider than we are ready to acknowledge. Perhaps " the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." God has always the means of punishment as well as of pardon in his own hands. But to punish just at the moment when we would hurl the bolt, might break in on a scheme of Providence of wide extent and indefinite consequences. " They have drunk their hemlock," says a fine writer, " but the poison does not yet work." Perhaps the convulsion may be the more terrible for the delay. Let us not be impatient to accomplish a sentence which infinite justice sees

right to defer—It is always time enough to enter into hell. Let us think more of restraining our own vindictive tempers, than of precipitating their destruction. They may yet repent of the crimes they are perpetrating. God may still by some scheme, intricate, and unintelligible to us, pardon the sin which we think exceeds the limits even of his mercy.

But we contrive to make revenge itself look like religion. We call down thunder on many a head under pretence that those on whom we invoke it are God's enemies, when perhaps we invoke it because they are ours.

But though they should go on with a full tide of prosperity to the end, will it not cure our impatience that that end must come? will it not satisfy us that they must die, that they must come to judgment? Which is to be envied, the Christian who dies and his brief sorrows have a period, or he who closes a prosperous life and enters on a miserable eternity? The one has nothing to fear if the promises of the Gospel be true, the other nothing to hope if they be not false. The word of God must be a lie, heaven a fable, hell an invention, before the impenitent sinner can be safe. Is that man to be envied whose security depends on their falsehood? Is the other to be pitied whose hope is founded on their reality. Can

that state be happiness, which results from believing that there is no God, no future reckoning? Can that state be misery which consists in knowing that there is both?

In estimating the comparative happiness of good and bad men, we should ever bear in mind that of all the calamities which can be inflicted or suffered, sin is the greatest; and of all punishments, insensibility to sin is the heaviest which the wrath of God inflicts in this world for the commission of it. God so far then from approving a wicked man, because he suffers him to go on triumphantly, seems rather, by allowing him to continue his smooth and prosperous course, to have some awful destiny in store for him, which will not perhaps be revealed till his repentance is too late; then his knowledge of God's displeasure, and the dreadful consequences of that displeasure, may be revealed together, may be revealed when there is no room for mercy.

But without looking to futurity—consulting only the present condition of suffering virtue; if we put the inward consolation derived from communion with God, the humble confidence of prayer, the devout trust in the divine protection—supports commonly reserved for the afflicted Christian, and eminently bestowed in

his greatest exigence ; if we place these feelings in the opposite scale with all that unjust power ever bestowed, or guilty wealth possessed ; we shall have no hestitation in deciding on which side even present happiness lies.

With a mind thus fixed, with a faith thus firm, one great object so absorbs the Christian that his peace is not tost about with the things which discompose ordinary men. " My fortune," may he say, " it is true, is shattered ; but as I made not " fine gold my confidence" while I possessed it, in losing ti I have not lost myself. I leaned not on power, for I knew its instability. Had prosperity been my dependence, my support being removed, I must fall."

In the case of the afflicted christian you lament perhaps with the wife of the persecuted hero, that he suffers being innocent. But would it extract the sting from suffering, were guilt added to it ? Out of two worlds to have all sorrow in this and no hope in the next would be indeed intolerable. Would you have him purchase a reprieve from suffering by sinful compliances ? Think how ease would be destroyed by the price paid for it ! for how short a time he would enjoy it, even if it were not bought at the expence of his soul !

It would be preposterous to say that suffering is the recompence of virtue, and yet it may with truth be asserted that the capacity for enjoying the reward of virtue is enlarged by suffering; and thus it becomes not only the instrument of promoting virtue, but the instrument of rewarding it. Besides, God chuses for the confirmation of our faith, as well as for the consummation of his gracious plans, to reserve in his own hand this most striking proof of a future retribution. To suppose that he *cannot* ultimately recompence his virtuous afflicted children is to believe him less powerful than an earthly father—to suppose that he *will* not, is to believe him less merciful.

Great trials are oftener proofs of favour than of displeasure. An inferior officer will suffice for inferior expeditions, but the Sovereign selects the ablest General for the most difficult service. And not only does the king evidence his opinion by the selection, but the soldier proves his attachment by rejoicing in the preference. His having gained one victory is no reason for his being set aside. Conquest which qualifies him for new attacks, suggests a reason for his being again employed.

The sufferings of good men by no means contradict the promise that "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is," nor that

promise "that the meek shall inherit the earth." They possess it by the spirit in which they enjoy its blessings, by the spirit with which they resign them.

The belief too that trials will facilitate salvation is another source of consolation. Sufferings also abate the dread of death by cheapening the price of life. The affections even of the real Christian are too much drawn downwards. His heart too fondly cleaves to the dust, though he knows that trouble springs out of it. How would it be, if he invariably possessed present enjoyments, and if a long vista of delights lay always open before him? He has a farther comfort in his own honest consciousness; a bright conviction that his Christian feeling under trials is a cheering evidence that his piety is sincere. The gold has been melted down, and its purity is ascertained.

Among his other advantages, the afflicted Christian has that of being able to apply to the mercy of God, not as a new and untried, and therefore an uncertain resource. He does not come as an alien before a strange master, but as a child into the well known presence of a tender father. He did not put off prayer till this pressing exigence. He did not make his God a sort of *dernier resort* to be had recourse to only in the great waterfloods. He

had long and diligently sought him in the calm; he had adhered to him, if the phrase may be allowed, before he was driven to it. He had sought God's favour while he enjoyed the favour of the world. He did not wait for the day of evil to seek the supreme Good. He did not defer his meditations on heavenly things to the disconsolate hour when earth has nothing for him. He can cheerfully associate religion with those former days of felicity, when with every thing before him out of which to chuse, he chose God. He not only feels the support derived from his present prayers, but the benefit of all those which he offered up in the day of joy and gladness. He will especially derive comfort from the supplications he had made for the anticipated though unknown trial of the present hour, and which in such a world of vicissitudes, it was reasonable to expect.

Let us confess then, that in all the trying circumstances of this changeful scene, there is something infinitely soothing to the feelings of a Christian, something inexpressibly tranquillizing to his mind, to know that he has nothing to do with events but to submit to them; that he has nothing to do with the revolutions of life but to acquiesce in them, as the dispensations of eternal wisdom; that he has

not to take the management out of the hands of Providence, but submissively to follow the divine leading; that he has not to contrive for to-morrow, but to acquiesce to-day; not to condition about events yet to come, but to meet those which are present with cheerful resignation. Let him be thankful that as he could not by forseeing prevent them, so he was not permitted to foresee them; thankful for ignorance where knowledge would only prolong without preventing suffering; thankful for that grace which has promised that our strength shall be proportioned to our day; thankful that as he is not responsible for trials which he has not brought on himself, so by the goodness of God these trials may be improved to the noblest purposes. The quiet acquiescence of the heart, the annihilation of the will under actual circumstances, be the trial great or small, is more acceptable to God, more indicative of true piety, than the strongest general resolutions of firm acting and deep submission under the most trying unborn events. In the remote case it is the imagination which submits: in the actual case it is the will.

We are too ready to imagine that there is no other way of serving God but by active exertions; exertions which are often made because they indulge our natural taste, and gratify our own

inclinations. But it is an error to imagine that God by putting us into any supposeable situation, puts it out of our power to glorify him; that he can place us under any circumstances which may not be turned to some account, either for ourselves or others. Joseph in his prison under the strongest disqualifications, loss of liberty and a blasted reputation, made way for both his own high advancement and for the deliverance of Israel. Daniel in his dungeon, not only the destined prey, but in the very jaws of furious beasts, converted the king of Babylon and brought him to the knowledge of the true God. Could prosperity have effected the former? Would not prosperity have prevented the latter?

But to descend to more familiar instances—It is among the ordinary, though most mysterious dispensations of Providence, that many of his appointed servants who are not only eminently fitted, but also most zealously disposed, to glorify their Redeemer by instructing and reforming their fellow creatures, are yet disqualified by disease, and set aside from that public duty of which the necessity is so obvious, and of which the fruits were so remarkable, whilst many others possess uninterrupted health and strength, for the exercise of those functions for which they are little gifted and less disposed.

But God's ways are not as our ways. He is not accountable to his creatures. The caviller would know why it is right. The suffering Christian believes and feels it to be right. He humbly acknowledges the necessity of the affliction which his friends are lamenting; he feels the mercy of the measure which others are suspecting of injustice. With deep humility he is persuaded that if the affliction is not yet withdrawn, it is because it has not yet accomplished the purpose for which it was sent. The privation is probably intended both for the individual interests of the sufferer, and for the reproof of those who have neglected to profit by his labours. Perhaps God more especially thus draws still nearer to himself, him who had drawn so many others.

But to take a more particular view of the case, we are too ready to consider suffering as an indication of God's displeasure, not so much against sin in general, as against the individual sufferer. Were this the case, then would those saints and martyrs who have pined in exile, and groaned in dungeons, and expired on scaffolds, have been the objects of God's peculiar wrath instead of his special favour. But the truth is, some little tincture of latent infidelity mixes itself in almost all our reasonings on these topics.

We do not constantly take into the account a future state. We want God, if I may hazard the expression, to clear himself as he goes. We cannot give him such long credit as the period of human life. He must every moment be vindicating his character against every sceptical cavil ; he must unravel his plans to every shallow critic, he must anticipate the knowledge of his design before its operations are completed. If we may adopt a phrase in use among the vulgar, we will trust him no farther than we can see him. Though he has said, "judge nothing before the time," we judge instantly, of course rashly, and in general falsely. Were the brevity of earthly prosperity and suffering, the certainty of retributive justice, and the eternity of future blessedness perpetually kept in view, we should have more patience with God.

Even in judging fictitious compositions, we are more just. During the perusal of a tragedy, or any work of invention, though we feel for the distresses of the personages, yet we do not form an ultimate judgment of the propriety or injustice of their sufferings. We wait for the catastrophe. We give the poet credit either that he will extricate them from their distresses, or eventually explain the justice of them. We do not condemn him at the end of every scene for

the trials of that scene, which the sufferers do not appear to have deserved; for the sufferings which do not always seem to have arisen from their own misconduct. We behold the trials of the virtuous with sympathy, and the successes of the wicked with indignation; but we do not pass our final sentence till the poet has passed his. We reserve our decisive judgment till the last scene closes, till the curtain drops. Shall we not treat the schemes of infinite wisdom with as much respect as the plot of a Drama.

But to borrow our illustration from realities. —In a Court of Justice the by-standers do not give their sentence in the midst of a trial. We wait patiently till all the evidence is collected, and circumstantially detailed and finally summed up. And—to pursue the allusion—imperfect as human decisions may possibly be, fallible as we must allow the most deliberate and honest verdict must prove, we commonly applaud the justice of the jury and the equity of the judge. The felon they condemn, we rarely acquit; where they remit judgment, we rarely denounce it.—It is only INFINITE WISDOM on whose purposes we cannot rely; it is only INFINITE MERCY whose operations we cannot trust. It is only "the Judge of all the earth" who cannot do right. We reverse the order of God by sum-

moning HIM to our bar, at whose awful bar we shall soon be judged.

But to return to our more immediate point—the apparently unfair distribution of prosperity between good and bad men. As their case is opposite in every thing—the one is constantly deriving his happiness from that which is the source of the other's misery, a sense of the divine omniscience. The eye of God is "a pillar of light" to the one, "and a cloud and darkness" to the other. It is no less a terror to him who dreads HIS justice than a joy to him who derives all his support from the awful thought THOU GOD SEEST!

But as we have already observed, can we want a broader line of discrimination between them, than their actual condition here, independently of the different portions reserved for them hereafter? Is it not distinction enough that the one though sad is safe; that the other, though confident is insecure? Is not the one as far from rest as he is from virtue, as far from the enjoyment of quiet as from the hope of heaven? as far from peace as he is from God? Is it nothing that every day brings the Christian nearer to his crown, and that the sinner is every day working his way nearer to his ruin? The hour of death, which the one dreads as something worse

than extinction, is to the other the hour of his nativity, the birth-day of immortality. At the height of his sufferings, the good man knows that they will soon terminate. In the zenith of his success the sinner has a similar assurance. But how different is the result of the same conviction! An invincible faith sustains the one, in the severest calamities, while an inextinguishable dread gives the lie to the proudest triumphs of the other.

He then, after all, is the only happy man, not whom worldly prosperity renders apparently happy, but whom no change of worldly circumstances can make essentially miserable; whose peace depends not on external events, but on an internal support; not on that success which is common to all, but on that hope which is the peculiar privilege, on that promise which is the sole prerogative of the Christian.

CHAP. XXI.

THE TEMPER AND CONDUCT OF THE CHRISTIAN IN SICKNESS AND IN DEATH.

THE Pagan Philosophers have given many admirable precepts both for resigning blessings and for sustaining misfortunes; but wanting the motives and sanctions of Christianity, though they excite much intellectual admiration, they produce little practical effect. The Stars which glittered in their moral night, though bright, imparted no warmth. Their most beautiful dissertations on death had no charm to extract its sting. We receive no support from their most elaborate treatises on immortality, for want of him who "brought life and immortality to light." Their consolatory discussions could not strip the grave of its terrors, for to them it was not "swallowed up in victory." To conceive of the soul as an immortal principle, without proposing a scheme for the pardon of its sins, was but cold

consolation. Their future state was but a happy guess; their heaven but a fortunate conjecture.

When we peruse their finest compositions, we admire the manner in which the medicine is administered, but we do not find it effectual for the cure, nor even for the mitigation of our disease. The beauty of the sentiment we applaud, but our heart continues to ache. There is no healing balm in their elegant prescription. These four little words "THY WILL BE DONE," contain a charm of more powerful efficacy than all the discipline of the stoic school. They cut up a long train of clear but cold reasoning, and supersede whole volumes of argument on fate and necessity.

What sufferer ever derived any ease from the subtle distinction of the hair-splitting casuist, who allowed "that pain was very troublesome, but resolved never to acknowledge it to be an evil?" There is an equivocation in his manner of stating the proposition. He does not directly say that pain is not an evil, but by a sophistical turn professes that philosophy will never *confess* it to be an evil. But what consolation does the sufferer draw from the quibbling nicety? "What difference is there," as Archbishop Tillotson well inquires, "between things being trouble-

some and being evils, when all the evil of an affliction lies in the trouble it creates to us?"

Christianity knows none of these fanciful distinctions. Se never pretends to insist that pain is not an evil, but she does more; she converts it into a good. Christianity therefore teaches a fortitude as much more noble than philosophy, as meeting pain with resignation to the hand that inflicts it, is more heroic than denying it to be an evil.

To submit on the mere human ground that there is no alternative, is not resignation but hopelessness. To bear affliction solely because impatience will not remove it, is but an inferior, though a just reason for bearing it. It savours rather of despair than submission when not sanctioned by a higher principle.—"It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good," is at once a motive of more powerful obligation than all the documents which philosophy ever suggested; a firmer ground of support than all the energies that natural fortitude ever supplied.

Under any visitation, sickness for instance, God permits us to think the affliction "not joyous but grievous." But though he allows us to feel, we must not allow ourselves to repine. There is again a sort of heroism in bearing up against affliction, which some adopt on

the ground that it raises their character, and confers dignity on their suffering. This philosophic firmness is far from being the temper which Christianity inculcates.

When we are compelled by the hand of God to endure sufferings, or driven by a conviction of the vanity of the world to renounce its enjoyments, we must not endure the one on the low principle of its being inevitable, nor, in flying from the other, must we retire to the contemplation of our own virtues. We must not, with a sullen intrepidity, collect ourselves into a centre of our own ; into a cold apathy to all without, and a proud approbation of all within. We must not contract our scattered faults into a sort of dignified selfishness ; nor concentrate our feelings into a proud magnanimity ; we must not adopt an independent rectitude. A gloomy stoicism is not Christian heroism. A melancholy non-resistance is not Christian resignation.

Nor must we indemnify ourselves for our outward self-control by secret murmurings. We may be admired for our resolution in this instance, as for our generosity and disinterestedness in other instances ; but we deserve little commendation for whatever we give up, if we do not give up our own inclination. It is inward repining that we must endeavour to re-

press; it is the discontent of the heart, the unexpressed but not unfelt murmur, against which we must pray for grace, and struggle for resistance. We must not smother our discontents before others, and feed on them in private. It is the hidden rebellion of the will we must subdue, if we would submit as Christians. Nor must we justify our impatience by saying, that if our affliction did not disqualify us from being useful to our families, and active in the service of God, we could more cheerfully bear it. Let us rather be assured that it does not disqualify us for that duty which we most need, and to which God calls us by the very disqualification.

A constant posture of defence against the attacks of our great spiritual enemy, is a better security than an incidental blow, or even an occasional victory. It is also a better preparation for all the occurrences of life. It is not some signal act of mortification, but an habitual state of discipline which will prepare us for great trials. A soul ever on the watch, fervent in prayer, diligent in self-inspection, frequent in meditation, fortified against the vanities of time by repeated views of eternity—all the avenues to such a heart will be in a good measure shut against temptation, barred in a great degree against the tempter. "Strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," it will be

enabled to resist the one, to expel the other. To a mind so prepared, the thoughts of sickness will not be new, for he knows it is the "condition of the battle:" The prospect of death will not be surprising, for he knows it is its termination.

The period is now come when we must summon all the fortitude of the rational being, all the resignation of the Christian. The principles we have been learning must now be made practical.—The speculations we have admired we must now realize. All that we have been studying was in order to furnish materials for this grand exigence. All the strength we have been collecting must now be brought into action. We must now draw to a point all the scattered arguments, all the several motives, all the individual supports, all the cheering promises of religion. We must exemplify all the rules we have given to others; we must embody all the resolutions we have formed for ourselves; we must reduce our precepts to experience; we must pass from discourses on submission to its exercise; from dissertations on suffering to sustaining it. We must heroically call up the determinations of our better days. We must recollect what we have said of the supports of faith and hope when our strength was in full vigour, when

our heart was at ease, and our mind undisturbed. Let us collect all that remains to us of mental strength. Let us implore the aid of holy hope and fervent faith, to shew that religion is not a beautiful theory but a soul-sustaining truth.

Endeavour without harassing scrutiny or distressing doubt, to act on the principles which your sounder judgment formerly admitted. The strongest faith is wanted in the hardest trials. Under those trials, to the confirmed Christian the highest degree of grace is commonly imparted. Impair not that faith on which you rested when your mind was strong by suspecting its validity now it is weak. That which had your full assent in perfect health, which was then firmly rooted in your spirit, and grounded in your understanding, must not be unfixed by the doubts of an enfeebled reason and the scruples of an impaired judgment. You may not now be able to determine on the reasonableness of propositions, but you may derive strong consolation from conclusions which were once fully established in your mind.

The reflecting Christian will consider the natural evil of sickness as the consequence and punishment of moral evil. He will mourn, not only that he suffers pain, but because that pain is the effect of sin. If man had not sinned he

would not have suffered. The heaviest aggravation of his pian is to know that he has deserved it. But it is a counterbalance to this trial to know that our merciful Father has no pleasure in the sufferings of his children, that he chastens them in love, that he never inflicts a stroke which he could safely spare; that he inflicts it to purify as well as to punish, to caution as well as to cure, to improve as well as to chastise.

What a support in the dreary season of sickness is it to reflect, that the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings; that if we suffer with him we shall also reign with him, which implies also the reverse, that if we do not suffer with him, we shall not reign with him; that is, if we suffer merely because we cannot help it, without reference to him, without suffering for his sake and in his spirit. If it be not sanctified suffering it will avail but little. We shall not be paid for having suffered, as in the creed of too many, but our meetness for the kingdom of glory will be increased if we suffer according to his will and after his example.

He who is brought to serious reflection by the salutary affliction of a sick bed, will look back with astonishment on his former false estimate of worldly things. Riches! Beauty! Plea-

sure! Genius! Fame!—what are they in the eyes of the sick and dying?

RICHES! These are so far from affording him a moment's ease, that it will be well if no former misapplication of them aggravate his present pains. He feels as if he only wished to live that he might henceforth dedicate them to the purposes for which they were given.

BEAUTY! What is beauty, he cries, as he considers his own sunk eyes, hollow cheeks, and pallid countenance. He acknowledges with the Psalmist, that the consuming of beauty is "the rebuke with which the Almighty corrects man for sin."

GENIUS! What is it? Without religion genius is only a lamp on the gate of a Palace. It may serve to cast a gleam of light on those without, while the inhabitant sits in darkness.

PLEASURE! That has not left a trace behind it. "It died in the birth, and is not therefore worthy to come into this bill of Mortality*."

FAME! Of this his very soul acknowledges the emptiness. He is astonished how he could ever be so infatuated as to run after a sound, to court a breath, to pursue a shadow, to embrace a cloud. Augustus, asking his friends as they surrounded his dying bed, if he had

* Bishop Hall.

acted his part well, on their answering in the affirmative, cried *plaudite*. But the acclamations of the whole universe would rather mock than soothe the dying Christian if unsanctioned by the hope of the divine approbation. He now rates at its just value that fame which was so often eclipsed by envy, and which will be so soon forgotten in death. He has no ambition left but for heaven, where there will be neither envy, death, nor forgetfulness.

When capable of reflection, the sick Christian will revolve all the sins and errors of his past life; he will humble himself for them as sincerely as if he had never repented of them before; and implore the divine forgiveness as fervently as if he did not believe they were long since forgiven. The remembrance of his former offences will grieve him, but the humble hope that they are pardoned will fill him "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Even in this state of helplessness he may improve his self-acquaintance. He may detect new deficiencies in his character, fresh imperfections in his virtues. Omissions will now strike him with the force of actual sins. Resignation, which he fancied was so easy when only the sufferings of others required it, he now finds to be difficult when called on to practise it himself. He has sometimes won-

dered at their impatience, he is now humbled at his own. He will not only try to bear patiently the pains he actually suffers, but will recollect gratefully those from which he has been delivered, and which he may have formerly found less supportable than his present sufferings.

In the extremity of pain he feels there is no consolation but in humble acquiescence in the divine will. It may be that he can pray but little, but that little will be fervent. He can articulate perhaps not at all, but his prayer is addressed to one who sees the heart, who can interpret its language, who requires not words but affections. A pang endured without a murmur, or only such an involuntary groan as nature extorts, and faith regrets, is itself a prayer.

If surrounded with all the accommodations of affluence, let him compare his own situation with that of thousands, who probably with greater merit, and under severer trials, have not one of his alleviations. When invited to the distateful remedy, let him reflect how many perishing fellow-creatures may be pining for that remedy, to whom it might be restorative, or who, fancying that it might be so, suffer additional distress from their inability to procure it.

In the intervals of severer pain he will turn his few advantages to the best account. He will make the most of every short respite. He will patiently bear with little disappointments, little delays, with the awkwardness or accidental neglect of his attendants, and, thankful for general kindness, he will accept goodwill instead of perfection. The suffering Christian will be grateful for small reliefs, little alleviations, short snatches of rest. To him abated pain will be positive pleasure. The freer use of limbs which had nearly lost their activtiy, will be enjoyments. Let not the reader who is rioting

In all the madness of superfluous health,

think lightly of these trivial comforts. Let him not despise them as not worthy of gratitude, or as not capable of exciting it. He may one day, and that no distant day, be brought to the same state of debility and pain. May he experience the mercies he now derides, and may he feel higher comforts on safe grounds!

The sufferer has perhaps often regretted that one of the worst effects of sickness is the selfishness it too naturally induces. The temptation to this he will resist, by not being exacting and unreasonable in his requisitions.

Through his tenderness to the feelings of others, he will be careful not to add to their distress by any appearance of discontent.

What a lesson against selfishness have we in the conduct of our dying Redeemer!—It was while bearing his Cross to the place of execution, that he said to the sorrowing multitude, "weep not for me, but for yourselves for and your children."—It was while enduring the agonies of crucifixion that he endeavoured to mitigate the sorrows of his mother and of his friend, by tenderly committing them to each other's care.—It was while sustaining the pangs of dissolution, that he gave the immediate promise of heaven to the expiring criminal.

The Christian will review, if able, not only the sins, but the mercies of his past life. If previously accustomed to unbroken health, he will bless God for the long period in which he has enjoyed it. If continued infirmity has been his portion, he will feel grateful that he has had such a long and gradual weaning from the world. From either state he will extract consolation. If pain be new, what a mercy to have hitherto escaped it! If habitual, we bear more easily what we have borne long.

He will review his temporal blessings and deliverances; his domestic comforts, his Christian friendships. Among his mercies his now

"purged eyes" will reckon his difficulties, his sorrows and trials. A new and heavenly light will be thrown on that passage, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted." It seems to him as if hitherto, he had only heard it with the hearing of his ear, but now his "eye seeth it." If he be a real christian, and has had enemies, he will always have prayed for them, but now he will be thankful for them. He will the more earnestly implore mercy for them as instruments which have helped to fit him for his present state. He will look up with holy gratitude to the great Physician, who by a divine chemistry in making up events, has made that one unpalatable ingredient, at the bitterness of which he once revolted, the very means by which all other things have worked together for good; had they worked separately they would not have worked efficaciously.

Under the most severe visitation, let us compare, if the capacity of comparing be allowed us, our own sufferings with the cup which our Redeemer drank for our sakes; drank to avert the divine displeasure from us. Let us pursue the comparative view of our condition with that of the Son of God. He was deserted in his most trying hour; deserted probably by those whose limbs, sight, life, he had restored, whose souls

he had come to save. We are surrounded by unwearied friends; every pain is mitigated by sympathy, every want not only relieved but prevented; the "asking eye" explored; the inarticulate sound understood; the ill-expressed wish anticipated; the but-suspected want supplied. When *our* souls are "exceeding sorrowful," *our* friends participate our sorrow; when desired "to watch" with us, they watch not "one hour" but many, not falling asleep, but both flesh and spirit ready and willing; not forsaking us in our "agony" but sympathizing where they cannot relieve.

Besides this, we must acknowledge with the penitent malefactor, "we indeed suffer justly but this man hath done nothing amiss." We suffer for our offences the inevitable penalty of our fallen nature. He bore *our* sins and those of the whole human race. Hence the heart-rending interrogation, "is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

How cheering in this forlorn state to reflect that he not only suffered for us then, but is sympathising with us now; that "in all our afflictions he is afflicted." The tenderness of the

sympathy seems to add a value to the sacrifice, while the vastness of the sacrifice endears the sympathy by ennobling it.

If the intellectual powers be mercifully preserved, how many virtues may now be brought into exercise which had either lain dormant or been considered as of inferior worth in the prosperous day of activity. The Christian temper indeed seems to be that part of religion which is more peculiarly to be exercised on a sick bed. The passive virtues, the least brilliant, but the most difficult, are then particularly called into action. To *suffer* the whole will of God on the tedious bed of languishing, is more trying than to perform the most shining exploit on the theatre of the world. The hero in the field of battle has the love of fame as well as patriotism to support him. He knows that the witnesses of his valour will be the heralds of his renown. The martyr at the stake is divinely stsengthened. Extraordinary grace is imparted for extraordinary trials. His pangs are exquisite but they are short. The crown is in sight, it is almost in possession. By faith "he sees the heavens opened. He sees the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." But to be strong in faith, and patient in hope, in a long and lingering sickness, is an example of

more general use and ordinary application, than even the sublime heroism of the martyr. The sickness is brought home to our feelings, we see it with our eyes, we apply it to our hearts. Of the martyr we read, indeed, with astonishment: Our faith is strengthened, and our admiration kindled; but we read it without that special approbation, without that peculiar reference to our own circumstances, which we feel in cases that are likely to apply to ourselves. With the dying friend we have not only a feeling of pious tenderness, but there is also a community of interests. The certain conviction that his case must soon be our own, makes it our own now. Self mixes with the social feeling, and the christian death we are contemplating we do not so much admire as a prodigy, as propose for a model. To the martyr's stake we feel that we are not likely to be brought. To the dying bed we must inevitably come.

Accommodating his state of mind to the nature of his disease, the dying christian will derive consolation in any case, either from thinking how forcibly a sudden sickness breaks the chain which binds him to the world, or how gently a gradual decay unties it. He will feel and acknowledge the necessity of all he suffers to wean him from life. He will admire the divine

goodness which commissions the infirmities of sickness to divest the world of its enchantments, and to strip death of some of its most formidable terrors. He feels with how much less reluctance we quit a body exhausted by suffering than one in the vigour of health.

Sickness, instead of narrowing the heart, its worst effect on an unrenewed mind, enlarges his. He earnestly exhorts those around him to defer no act of repentance, no labour of love, no deed of justice, no work of mercy, to that state of incapacity in which he now lies.

How many motives has the Christian to restrain his murmurs! Murmuring offends God both as it is injurious to his goodness and as it perverts the occasion which God has now afforded for giving an example of patience. Let us not complain that we have nothing to do in sickness, when we are furnished with the opportunity as well as called to the duty of resignation; the duty indeed is always ours, but the occasion is now more eminently given. Let us not say even in this depressed state that we have nothing to be thankful for. If sleep be afforded, let us acknowledge the blessing; if wearisome nights be our portion, let us remember they are "appointed to us." Let us mitigate the grievance of watchfulness by considering it as a sort of

prolongation of life; as the gift of more minutes granted for meditation and prayer. If we are not able to employ it to either of these purposes, there is a fresh occasion for exercising that resignation which will be accepted for both.

If reason be continued, yet with sufferings too intense for any religious duty, the sick Christian may take comfort that the business of life was accomplished, before the sickness began. He will not be terrified if duties are superseded, if means are at an end, for he has nothing to do but to die.—This is the act for which all other acts, all other duties, all other means, will have been preparing him. He who has long been habituated to look death in the face, who has often anticipated the agonies of dissolving nature; who has accustomed himself to pray for support under them, will now feel the blessed effect of those petitions which have long been treasured in heaven. To those anticipatory prayers he may perhaps now owe the humble confidence of hope in this inevitable hour. Habituated to the contemplation, he will not, at least, have the dreadful additions of surprize and novelty to aggravate the trying scene. It has long been familiar to his mind, though hitherto it could only operate with the inferior force of a picture to a reality. He will not however have so much

scared his imagination by the terrors of death, as invigorated his spirit by looking beyond them to the blessedness which follows. Faith will not not so much dwell on the opening grave as shoot forward to the glories to which it leads. The hope of heaven will soften the pangs which lie in the way to it. On heaven then he will fix his eyes rather than on the awful intervening circumstances. He will not dwell on the struggle which is for a moment, but on the crown which is forever. He will endeavour to think less of death than of its conqueror; less of the grave than of its spoiler; less of the body in ruins than of the spirit in glory; less of the darkness of his closing day than of the opening dawn of immortality. In some brighter moments, when viewing his eternal redemption drawing nigh, as if the freed spirit had already burst its prison walls, as if the manumission had actually taken place, he is ready exultingly to exclaim, "my soul is escaped, the snare is broken, and I am delivered."

If he ever inclines to wish for recovery, it is only that he may glorify God by his future life, more than he has done by the past; but as he knows the deceitfulness of his heart, he is not certain that this would be the case, and he therefore does not wish to live. Yet should he be restored, he humbly resolves, in a better strength

than his own, to dedicate his life to the restorer.

But he suffers not his thoughts to dwell on life. retrospections are at an end. His prospects as to this world are at an end also. He commits himself unreservedly to his heavenly Father. But though secure of the port, he may still dread the passage. The Christian will rejoice that his rest is at hand, the man may shudder at the unknown transit. If faith is strong, nature is weak. Nay in this awful exigence strong faith is sometimes rendered faint through the weakness of nature.

At the moment when his faith is looking round for every additional confirmation, he may rejoice in those blessed certainties, those glorious realizations which scripture affords. He may take comfort that the strongest attestations given by the apostles to the reality of the heavenly state were not conjectural. They, to use the words of our Saviour, spake what they knew and testified what they had seen. "I reckon," says St. Paul, "that the afflictions of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." He said this *after* he had been caught up into the third heaven; *after* he had beheld the glories to which he alludes. The Author of the Apocalyptic vision having de-

scribed the ineffable glories of the new Jerusalem, thus puts new life and power into his description.—"I John *saw* these things, and *heard* them."

The power of distinguishing objects increases with our approach to them. The Christian feels that he is entering on a state where every care will cease, every fear vanish, every desire be fulfilled, every sin be done away, every grace perfected. Where there will be no more temptations to resist, no more passions to subdue; no more insensibility to mercies, no more deadness in service, no more wandering in prayer, no more sorrows to be felt for himself, nor tears to be shed for others. He is going where his devotion will be without languor, his love without alloy, his doubts certainty, his expectation enjoyment, his hope fruition. All will be perfect, for God will be all in all.

From God he knows that he shall derive immediately all his happiness. It will no longer pass through any of those channels which now sully its purity. It will be offered him through no second cause which may fail, no intermediate agent which may deceive, no uncertain medium which may disappoint. The felicity is not only certain, but perfect,—not only perfect, but eternal.

As he approaches the land of realities,the shadows of this earth cease to interest or mislead him. The films are removed from his eyes. Objects are stripped of their false lustre. Nothing that is really little any longer looks great. The mists of vanity are dispersed. Every thing which is to have an end appears small, appears nothing. Eternal things assume their proper magnitude—for he beholds them in the true point of vision. He has ceased to lean on the world for he has found it both a reed and a spear; it has failed and it has pierced him. He leans not on himself, for he has long known his weakness. He leans not on his virtues, for they can do nothing for him. Had he no better refuge he feels that his sun would set in darkness; his life close in despair.

But he knows in whom he has trusted, and therefore knows not what he should fear. He looks upward with holy but humble confidence to that great Shepherd, who having long since conducted him into green pastures, having by his rod corrected, and by his staff supported him, will, he humbly trusts, guide him through the dark valley of the shadow of death, and safely land him on the peaceful shores of everlasting rest.

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